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# ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

SPRING—  
SUMMER  
**1972**

EDITED BY

"Ellery Queen"

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 PARK AVE. SOUTH  
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Dear Reader:

This is the 23rd in *EQMM's* series of original paperback anthologies, now published twice a year...

We trust this volume finds you in pleasant circumstances, enjoying comfort or even luxury — finds you, in a phrase, "living in clover"; for a multileaved clover is the symbol of the story categories in this book. EQA clover — genus *Trifolium*, species *Eleanorus sullivanana* (and forgive our homegrown Latin).

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Oscar Wilde

So, once again, as in the 22 earlier semi-annuals, our editorial policy is like a maturing plant: the roots are in the best-of-show standards of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, so carefully cultivated these past 31 years; the stems are the high quality and professionalism of the writing; the leaves are the evergreen originality and craftsmanship of the plotting; the blossoms are the 2 short novels, 4 novelets, and 10 short stories in this book, none of which (with one exception) has ever appeared in any of the 63 anthologies previously sown and grown by

ELLERY QUEEN

# Rex Stout

## The Gun with Wings

Peggy Mion and Fred Weppler were in love—as deeply in love as a mature woman and a mature man can be. But they shared a secret—certain guilty knowledge that should have been told to the police. And this secret knowledge prevented Peggy and Fred from getting married.

But as Archie Goodwin, that shrewd observer, remarked, "People in love aren't supposed to think—that's why they have to hire trained thinkers."

And that's why Peggy and Fred, in deep trouble, hired the Fat Man, the beer-drinking, orchid-growing Nero Wolfe, to think their way out of—murder.

One of Rex Stout's best short novels, complete in this anthology...

### Detectives: NERO WOLFE and ARCHIE GOODWIN

The young woman took a pink piece of paper from her handbag, got up from the red leather chair, put the paper on Nero Wolfe's desk, and sat down again. Feeling it my duty to keep myself informed and also to save Wolfe the exertion of leaning forward and reaching so far, I arose and crossed to hand the paper to him after a glance at it.

It was a check for five thousand dollars, dated that day, August fourteenth, made

out to him, and signed Margaret Mion. He gave a look, and dropped it back on the desk.

"I thought," she said, "perhaps that would be the best way to start the conversation."

In my chair at my desk, taking her in, I was readjusting my attitude. When, early that Sunday afternoon, she had phoned for an appointment, I had dug up a vague recollection of a picture of her in the paper some months back, and had decided it would be no treat to

meet her; but now I was hedging.

Her appeal wasn't what she had, which was only so-so, but what she did with it. I don't mean tricks. Her mouth wasn't attractive even when she smiled, but the smile was. Her eyes were just a pair of brown eyes, nothing at all sensational, but it was a pleasure to watch them move around, from Wolfe to me to the man who had come with her, seated off to her left. I guessed she had maybe three years to go to reach thirty.

"Don't you think," the man asked her, "we should get some questions answered first?"

His tone was strained and a little harsh, and his face matched it. He was worried and didn't care who knew it. With his deep-set gray eyes and well-fitted jaw he might on a happier day have passed for a leader of men, but not as he now sat. Something was eating him. When Mrs. Mion had introduced him as Mr. Frederick Weppler I had recognized the name of the music critic of the *Gazette*, but I couldn't remember whether he had been mentioned in the newspaper accounts of the event that had caused the publication of Mrs. Mion's picture.

She shook her head at him, not arbitrarily. "It wouldn't help, Fred, really. We'll just

have to tell it and see what he says." She smiled at Wolfe—or maybe it wasn't actually a smile, but just her way of handling her lips. "Mr. Weppler wasn't quite sure we should come to see you, and I had to persuade him. Men are more cautious than women, aren't they?"

"Yes," Wolfe agreed, and added, "thank heaven."

She nodded. "I suppose so." She gestured. "I brought that check with me to show that we really mean it. We're in trouble and we want you to get us out. We want to get married and we can't. That is—if I should just speak for myself—I want to marry him." She looked at Weppler, and this time it was unquestionably a smile. "Do you want to marry me, Fred?"

"Yes," he muttered. Then he suddenly jerked his chin up and looked defiantly at Wolfe. "You understand this is embarrassing, don't you? It's none of your business, but we've come to get your help. I'm thirty-four years old, and this is the first time I've ever been—" He stopped. In a moment he said stiffly, "I am in love with Mrs. Mion and I want to marry her more than I have ever wanted anything in my life." His eyes went to his love and he murmured a plea. "Peggy!"

Wolfe grunted. "I accept

that as proven. You both want to get married. Why don't you?"

"Because we can't," Peggy said. "We simply can't. It's on account—you may remember reading about my husband's death in April, four months ago? Alberto Mion, the opera singer?"

"Vaguely. You'd better refresh my memory."

"Well, he killed himself." There was no sign of a smile now. "Fred—Mr. Weppler and I found him. It was seven o'clock, a Tuesday evening in April, at our apartment on East End Avenue. Just that afternoon Fred and I had found out that we loved each other, and—"

"Peggy!" Weppler called sharply.

Her eyes darted to him and back to Wolfe. "Perhaps I should ask you, Mr. Wolfe. He thinks we should tell you just enough so you understand the problem, and I think you can't understand it unless we tell you everything. What do you think?"

"I can't say until I hear it. Go ahead. If I have questions, we'll see."

She nodded. "I imagine you'll have plenty of questions. Have you ever been in love but would have died rather than let anyone see it?"

"Never," Wolfe said emphatically. I kept my face straight.

"Well, I was, and I admit it. But no one knew it, not even him. Did you, Fred?"

"I did not." Weppler was emphatic, too.

"Until that afternoon," Peggy told Wolfe. "He was at the apartment for lunch, and it happened right after lunch. The others had left, and all of a sudden we were looking at each other, and then he spoke or I did, I don't know which." She looked at Weppler imploringly. "I know you think this is embarrassing, Fred, but if he doesn't know what it was like, he won't understand why you went upstairs to see Alberto."

"Does he have to?" Weppler demanded.

"Of course he does." She returned to Wolfe. "I suppose I can't make you see what it was like. We were completely—well, we were in love, that's all, and I guess we had been for quite a while without saying it, and that made it all the more—more overwhelming. Fred wanted to see my husband right away, to tell him about it and decide what he could do, and I said all right, so he went upstairs—"

"Upstairs?"

"Yes, it's a duplex, and upstairs was my husband's soundproofed studio, where he practiced. So he went—"

"Please, Peggy," Weppler interrupted her. His eyes went to Wolfe. "You should have it first-hand. I went up to tell Mion that I loved his wife, and she loved me and not him, and to ask him to be civilized about it. Getting a divorce has come to be regarded as fairly civilized, but he didn't see it that way. He was anything but civilized. He wasn't violent, but he was damned mean. After some of that I got afraid I might do to him what Giff James had done, and I left. I didn't want to go back to Mrs. Mion while I was in that state of mind, so I left the studio by the door to the upper hall and took the elevator there."

"And?" Wolfe prodded him.

"I walked it off. I walked across the park, and after a while I calmed down and phoned Mrs. Mion, and she met me in the park. I told her what Mion's attitude was, and I asked her to leave him and come with me. She wouldn't do that." Weppler paused, and then went on, "There are two complications you ought to have if you're to have everything."

"If they're relevant, yes."

"They're relevant all right. First, Mrs. Mion had and has money of her own. That was an added attraction for Mion. It wasn't for me. I'm just telling you."

"Thank you. And the second?"

"The second was Mrs. Mion's reason for not leaving Mion immediately. I suppose you know he had been the top tenor at the Met for five or six years, and his voice was gone—temporarily. Gifford James, the baritone, had hit him on the neck with his fist and hurt his larynx—that was early in March—and Mion couldn't finish the season. It had been operated on, but his voice hadn't come back, and naturally he was glum, and Mrs. Mion wouldn't leave him under those circumstances. I tried to persuade her to, but she wouldn't.

"I wasn't anything like normal that day, on account of what had happened to me for the first time in my life, and on account of what Mion had said to me, so I wasn't reasonable and I left her in the park and went downtown to a bar and started drinking. A lot of time went by and I had quite a few, but I wasn't pickled. Along toward seven o'clock I decided I had to see her again and carry her off so she wouldn't spend another night there.

"That mood took me back to East End Avenue and up to the twelfth floor, and then I stood there in the hall a while, perhaps ten minutes, before my finger went to the pushbutton.

Finally I rang, and the maid let me in and went for Mrs. Mion, but I had lost my nerve or something. All I did was suggest that we should have a talk with Mion together. She agreed, and we went upstairs and—”

“Using the elevator?”

“No, the stairs inside the apartment. We entered the studio. Mion was on the floor. We went over to him. There was a big hole through the top of his head. He was dead. I led Mrs. Mion out, made her come, and on the stairs—they’re too narrow to go two abreast—she fell and rolled halfway down. I carried her to her room and put her on her bed, and I started for the living room, for the phone there, when I thought of something to do first.

“I went out and took the elevator to the ground floor, got the doorman and elevator man together, and asked them who had been taken up to the Mion apartment, either the twelfth floor or the thirteenth, that afternoon. I said they must be damn sure not to skip anybody. They gave me the names and I wrote them down. Then I went back up to the apartment and phoned the police.

“After I did that it struck me that a layman isn’t supposed to decide if a man is dead, so I phoned Dr. Lloyd, who has an

apartment there in the building. He came at once, and I took him up to the studio. We hadn’t been there more than three or four minutes when the first policeman came, and—”

“If you please,” Wolfe put in crossly. “Everything is sometimes too much. You haven’t even hinted at the trouble you’re in.”

“I’ll get to it—”

“But faster, I hope, if I help. My memory has been jogged. The doctor and the police pronounced him dead. The muzzle of the revolver had been thrust into his mouth; and the emerging bullet had torn out a piece of his skull. The revolver, found lying on the floor beside him, belonged to him and was kept there in the studio. There was no sign of any struggle and no mark of any other injury on him. The loss of his voice was an excellent motive for suicide. Therefore, after a routine investigation, giving due weight to the difficulty of sticking the barrel of a loaded revolver into a man’s mouth without arousing him to protest, it was recorded as suicide. Isn’t that correct?”

They nodded.

“Have the police reopened it? Or is gossip at work?”

They shook their heads.

“Then let’s get on. Where’s the trouble?”

"It's us," Peggy said.

"Why? What's wrong with you?"

"Everything." She gestured. "No, I don't mean that—not everything, just one thing. After my husband's death and the routine investigation, I went away for a while. When I came back—for the past two months Fred and I have been together some, but it wasn't right—I mean we didn't feel right. The day before yesterday, Friday, I went to friends in Connecticut for the week-end, and he was there. Neither of us knew the other was coming. We talked it out yesterday and last night and this morning, and we decided to come and ask you to help us—anyway, I did, and he wouldn't let me come alone."

Peggy leaned forward in deadly earnest. "You *must* help us, Mr. Wolfe. I love him so much—so much!—and he says he loves me, and I know he does! Yesterday afternoon we decided we would get married in October, and then last night we got started talking—but it isn't what we say, it's what is in our eyes when we look at each other. We just can't get married with that back of our eyes and trying to hide it—"

A little shiver went over her. "For years—forever? We can't! We know we can't—it would be horrible! What it is, it's a

question: Who killed Alberto? Did he? Did I? I don't really think Fred did, and he doesn't really think I did—I hope he doesn't—but it's there back of our eyes, and we know it is!"

She extended both hands. "We want you to find out!"

Wolfe snorted. "Nonsense. You need a spanking or a psychiatrist. The police may have shortcomings, but they're not nincompoops. If they're satisfied—"

"But that's it! They wouldn't be if we had told the truth!"

"Oh." Wolfe's brows went up. "You lied to them?"

"Yes. Or if we didn't lie, anyhow we didn't tell them the truth. We didn't tell them that when we first went in together and saw him, there was no gun lying there. There was no gun in sight."

"Indeed. How sure are you?"

"Absolutely positive. I never saw anything clearer than I saw that—that sight—all of it. There was no gun."

Wolfe snapped at Wepple, "You agreee, sir?"

"Yes. She's right."

Wolfe sighed. "Well," he conceded, "I can see that you're really in trouble. Spanking wouldn't help."

I shifted in my chair on account of a tingle at the lower part of my-spine. Nero Wolfe's

old brownstone house on West Thirty-fifth Street was an interesting place to live and work—for Fritz Brenner, the chef and housekeeper, for Theodore Horstmann, who fed and nursed the ten thousand orchids in the plant rooms on the roof, and for me, Archie Goodwin, whose main field of operations was the big office on the ground floor.

Naturally I thought my job the most interesting, since a confidential assistant to a famous private detective is constantly getting an earful of all kinds of troubles and problems—everything from a missing necklace to a new blackmail gimmick. Very few clients actually bored me. But only one kind of case gave me that tingle in the spine: murder. And if this pair of lovebirds were talking straight, this was it.

I had filled two notebooks when they left, more than two hours later.

If they had thought it through before they phoned for an appointment with Wolfe, they wouldn't have phoned. All they wanted, as Wolfe pointed out, was the moon. They wanted him, first, to investigate a four-month-old murder without letting on there had been one; second, to prove that

neither of them had killed Alberto Mion, which could be done only by finding out who had; and third, in case he concluded that one of them had done it, to file it away and forget it.

Not that they put it that way, since their story was that they were both absolutely innocent; but that was what it amounted to.

Wolfe made it good and plain. "If I take the job," he told them, "and find evidence to convict someone of murder, no matter who, the use I make of it will be solely in my discretion. I am neither an Astraea nor a sadist, but I like my door open. But if you want to drop it now, here's your check and Mr. Goodwin's notebooks will be destroyed. We can forget you have been here, and shall."

That was one of the moments when they were within an ace of getting up and going, especially Fred Weppler, but they didn't. They looked at each other, and it was all in their eyes. By that time I had about decided I liked them both pretty well and was even beginning to admire them, they were so damn determined to get loose from the trap they were in. When they looked at each other like that their eyes said, "Let's go and be together, my

darling love, and forget this—come on, come on." Then they said, "It will be so wonderful!" Then they said, "Yes, oh, yes, but—But we don't want it wonderful for a day or a week; it must be always wonderful—and we know..."

It took strong muscles to hold onto it like that, not to mention horse sense, and several times I caught myself feeling sentimental about it. Then of course there was the check for five grand on Wolfe's desk.

The notebooks were full of assorted matters. There were a thousand details which might or might not turn out to be pertinent—such as the mutual dislike between Peggy Mion and Rupert Grove, her husband's manager, or the occasion of Gifford James socking Alberto Mion in front of witnesses, or the attitudes of various persons toward Mion's demand for damages; but you couldn't use it all, and Wolfe himself never needed more than a fraction of it, so I'll pick and choose.

Of course, the gun was Exhibit A. It was a new one, having been bought by Mion the day after Gifford James had slugged him and hurt his larynx—not, he had announced, for vengeance on James but for future protection. He had carried it in a pocket whenever

he went out, and at home had kept it in the studio, lying on the base of a bust of Caruso. So far as known, it had never fired but one bullet—the one that killed Mion.

When Dr. Lloyd had arrived and Weppeler had taken him to the studio, the gun was lying on the floor not far from Mion's knee. Dr. Lloyd's hand had started for it but had been withdrawn without touching it, so it had been there when the law came. Peggy was positive it had not been there when she and Fred had entered, and he agreed. The cops had made no announcement about finger-prints, which wasn't surprising since none are hardly ever found on a gun that are any good. Throughout the two hours and a half, Wolfe kept darting back to the gun, but it simply didn't have wings.

The picture of the day and the day's people was all filled in. The morning seemed irrelevant, so it started at lunchtime with five of them there: Mion, Peggy, Fred, one Adele Bosley, and Dr. Lloyd. It was more professional than social. Fred had been invited because Mion wanted to sell him the idea of writing a piece for the *Gazette* saying that the rumors that Mion would never be able to sing again were malicious hooey. Adele Bosley, who was

in charge of Public Relations for the Metropolitan Opera, had come to help work on Fred. Dr. Lloyd had been asked so he could assure Weppler that the operation he had performed on Mion's larynx had been successful and it was a good bet that by the time the opera season opened in November the great tenor would be as good as ever.

Nothing special had happened except that Fred had agreed to do the piece. Adele Bosley and Dr. Lloyd had left, and Mion had gone up to the soundproofed studio, and Fred and Peggy had looked at each other and suddenly discovered the most important fact of life since the Garden of Eden.

An hour or so later there had been another gathering, this time up in the studio, around half-past three, but neither Fred nor Peggy had been present. By then Fred had walked himself calm and phoned Peggy, and she had gone to meet him in the park, so their information on the meeting in the studio was hearsay. Besides Mion and Dr. Lloyd there had been four people: Adele Bosley for operatic public relations; Mr. Rupert Grove, Mion's manager; Mr. Gifford James, the baritone who had socked Mion in the neck six weeks before; and Judge Henry Arnold, James's lawyer. This affair had been

even less social than the lunch, having been arranged to discuss a formal request that Mion had made of Gifford James for the payment of a quarter of a million bucks for the damage to Mion's larynx.

Fred and Peggy's hearsay had it that the conference had been fairly hot at points, with the temperature boosted right at the beginning by Mion's getting the gun from Caruso's bust and placing it on a table at his elbow. On the details of its course they were pretty sketchy, since they hadn't been there, but anyhow the gun hadn't been fired.

Also there was plenty of evidence that Mion was alive and well—except for his larynx—when the party broke up. He had made two phone calls after the conference had ended, one to his barber and one to a wealthy female opera patron; his manager, Rupert Grove, had phoned him a little later; and around five-thirty he had phoned downstairs to the maid to bring him a bottle of vermouth and some ice, which she had done. She had taken the tray into the studio, and he had been upright and intact.

I was careful to get all the names spelled right in my notebook, since it seemed likely the job would be to get one of them tagged for murder, and I

was especially careful with the last one that got in: Clara James, Gifford's daughter. There were three spotlights on her. First, the reason for James's assault on Mion had been his knowledge or suspicion—Fred and Peggy weren't sure which—that Mion had stepped over the line with James's daughter.

Second, her name had ended the list, got by Fred from the doorman and elevator man, of people who had called that afternoon. They said she had come about a quarter-past six and had got off at the floor the studio was on, the thirteenth, and had summoned the elevator to the twelfth floor a little later, maybe ten minutes, and had left.

The third spotlight was directed by Peggy, who had stayed in the park a while after Fred had marched off, and had then returned home, arriving around five o'clock. She had not gone up to the studio and had not seen her husband. Some time after six, she thought around half-past, she had answered the doorbell herself because the maid had been in the kitchen with the cook.

It was Clara James. She was pale and tense, but she was always pale and tense. She had asked for Alberto, and Peggy

had said she thought he was up in the studio, and Clara had said no, he wasn't there, and never mind. When Clara went for the elevator button, Peggy had shut the door, not wanting company anyway, and particularly not Clara James.

Half an hour later Fred showed up, and they ascended to the studio together and found that Alberto was there all right, but no longer upright or intact.

That picture left room for a whole night of questions, but Wolfe concentrated on what he regarded as the essentials. Even so, we went into the third hour and the third notebook. He completely ignored some spots that I thought needed filling in: for instance, had Alberto had a habit of stepping over the line with other men's daughters or wives, or both, and, if so, names please. From things Fred and Peggy said I gathered that Alberto had been broad-minded about other men's women, but apparently Wolfe wasn't interested.

Along toward the end he was back on the gun again, and when they had nothing new to offer he scowled and got caustic. When they stayed glued he finally snapped at them, "Which one of you is lying?"

They looked hurt. "That won't get you anywhere," Fred

Weppler said bitterly. "Or us either."

"It would be silly," Peggy Mion protested, "to come here and give you that check and then lie to you. Wouldn't it?"

"Then you're silly," Wolfe said coldly. He pointed a finger at her. "Look here. All this might be worked out, none of it is preposterous, except one thing. Who put the gun on the floor beside the body? When you two first entered the studio it wasn't there; you both swear to that, and I accept it. You left and started downstairs; you fell, and he carried you to your room. You weren't unconscious. Were you?"

"No." Peggy was meeting his gaze. "I could have walked, but he—he wanted to carry me."

"No doubt. He did so. You stayed in your room. He went to the ground floor to compile a list of those who had made themselves possible murder suspects—showing admirable foresight, by the way—came back up and phoned the police and then the doctor, who arrived without delay since he lived in the building. Not more than fifteen minutes intervened between the moment you and Mr. Weppler left the studio and the moment he and the doctor entered.

"The door from the studio to the public hall on the

thirteenth floor has a lock that is automatic with the closing of the door, and the door was closed and locked. No one could possibly have entered during that fifteen minutes. You say that you had left your bed and gone to the living room, and that no one could have used that route without being seen by you. The maid and cook were in the kitchen, unaware of what was going on. So *no one* entered the studio and placed the gun on the floor."

"Someone did," Fred said doggedly.

Peggy insisted, "We don't know who had a key."

"You said that before." Wolfe was at them now. "Even if everyone had keys, I don't believe it and neither would anyone else." His eyes came to me. "Archie. Would you?"

"I'd have to see a movie of it," I admitted.

"You see?" he demanded of them. "Mr. Goodwin isn't prejudiced against you—on the contrary. He's ready to fight fire for you; see how he gets behind on his notes for the pleasure of watching you look at each other. But he agrees with me that you're lying. Since no one else could have put the gun on the floor, one of you did. I have to know about it. The circumstances may have

made it imperative for you, or you thought they did."

He looked at Fred. "Suppose you opened a drawer of Mrs. Mion's dresser to get smelling salts, and the gun was there, with an odor showing it had been recently fired—put there, you would instantly conjecture, by someone to direct suspicion at her. What would you naturally do? Exactly what you did do; take it upstairs and put it beside the body, without letting her know about it. Or—"

"Rot," Fred said harshly. "Absolute rot."

Wolfe looked at Peggy. "Or suppose it was you who found it there in your bedroom, after he had gone downstairs. Naturally you would have—"

"This is absurd," Peggy said with spirit. "How could it have been in my bedroom unless I put it there? My husband was alive at five-thirty, and I got home before that, and was right there, in the living room and bedroom, until Fred came at seven o'clock. So unless you assume—"

"Very well," Wolfe conceded. "Not the bedroom. But somewhere. I can't proceed until I get this out of one of you. Confound it, the gun didn't fly. I expect plenty of lies from the others, at least one of them, but I want the truth from you."

"You've got it," Fred declared.

"No. I haven't."

"Then it's a stalemate." Fred stood up. "Well, Peggy?"

They looked at each other, and their eyes went through the performance again. When they got to the place in the script where it said, "It must be wonderful always," Fred sat down.

But Wolfe, having no part in the script, horned in. "A stalemate," he said dryly, "ends the game, I believe."

Plainly it was up to me. If Wolfe openly committed himself to no dice, nothing would budge him. I arose, got the pretty pink check from his desk, put it on mine, placed a paperweight on it, sat down, and grinned at him.

"Granted that you're dead right," I observed, "which is not what you call apodictical, some day we ought to make up a list of the clients that have sat here and lied to us. There was Mike Walsh, and Calida Frost, and that cafeteria guy, Pratt—oh, dozens. But their money was good, and I didn't get so far behind with my notes that I couldn't catch up. All that for nothing?"

"About those notes," Fred Weppler said firmly. "I want to make something clear."

Wolfe looked at him.

He looked back. "We came here," he said, "to tell you in confidence about a problem and get you to investigate. Your accusing us of lying makes me wonder if we ought to go on, but if Mrs. Mion wants to I'm willing. But I want to make it plain that if you divulge what we've told you, if you tell the police or anyone else that we said there was no gun there when we went in, we'll deny it in spite of your damn notes. We'll deny it and stick to it!" He looked at his girl. "We've got to, Peggy! All right?"

"He wouldn't tell the police," Peggy declared, with fair conviction.

"Maybe not. But if he does, you'll stick with me on the denial. Won't you?"

"Certainly I will," she promised, as if he had asked her to help kill a rattlesnake.

Wolfe was taking them in, his lips tightened. Obviously, with the check on my desk on its way to the bank, he had decided to add them to the list of clients who told lies and go on from there. He forced his eyes wide open to rest them, let them half close again, and spoke.

"We'll settle that along with other things before we're through," he asserted. "You realize, of course, that I'm assuming your innocence—but evening."

I've made a thousand wrong assumptions before now, so they're not worth much. Has either of you a notion of who killed Mr. Mion?"

They shook their heads.

He grunted. "I have."

They opened their eyes at him.

He nodded. "It's only another assumption, but I like it. It will take work to validate it. To begin with, I must see the people you have mentioned—all six of them—and I would prefer not to string it out. Since you don't want them told that I'm investigating a murder, we must devise a stratagem. Did your husband leave a will, Mrs. Mion?"

She nodded.

"Are you the heir?"

"Yes, I—" She gestured. "I don't need it and don't want it."

"But it's yours. That will do nicely. An asset of the estate is the expectation of damages to be paid by Mr. James for his assault on Mr. Mion. You may properly claim that asset. The six people I want to see were all concerned in that affair, one way or another. I'll write them immediately, mailing the letters tonight Special Delivery, telling them that I represent you in the matter and would like them to call at my office tomorrow evening."

"That's impossible!" Peggy cried, shocked. "I couldn't! I wouldn't dream of asking Giff to pay damages—"

Wolfe banged a fist on his desk. "Confound it!" he roared. "Get out of here! Go! Do you think murders are solved by cutting out paper dolls? First you lie to me, and now you refuse to annoy people, including the murderer! Archie, put them out!"

"Good for you," I muttered at him. I was getting fed up, too. I glared at the would-be clients. "Try the Salvation Army," I suggested. "They're old hands at helping people in trouble. You can have the notebooks to take along—at cost, six bits. No charge for the contents."

They were looking at each other.

"I guess he has to see them somehow," Fred conceded. "He has to have a reason, and I must admit that's a good one. You don't owe them anything—not one of them."

Peggy gave in.

After a few details had been attended to, the most important of which was getting addresses; they left. The manner of their going, and of our speeding them, was so far from cordial that it might have been thought that instead of being the clients they were the prey. But the check was on my desk.

When, after letting them out, I returned to the office, Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes shut, frowning in distaste.

I stretched and yawned. "This ought to be fun," I said encouragingly. "Making it just a grab for damages. If the murderer is among the guests, see how long you can keep it from him. I bet he catches on before the jury comes in with the verdict."

"Shut up," he growled. "Blockheads."

"Oh, have a heart," I protested. "People in love aren't supposed to think—that's why they have to hire trained thinkers. You should be happy and proud they picked you. What's a good big lie or two when you're in love? When—"

"Shut up," he repeated. His eyes came open. "Your notebook. Those letters must go at once."

Monday evening's party lasted a full three hours, and murder wasn't mentioned once. Even so, it wasn't exactly jolly. The letters had put it straight that Wolfe, acting for Mrs. Mion, wanted to find out whether an appropriate sum could be collected from Gifford James without resort to lawyers and a court, and what sum would be thought appropriate. So each of them was

naturally in a state of mind: Gifford James himself; his daughter Clara; his lawyer, Judge Henry Arnold; Adele Bosley for Public Relations; Dr. Nicholas Lloyd as the technical expert; and Rupert Grove, who had been Mion's manager. That made six, which was just comfortable for our big office. Fred and Peggy had not been invited.

The James trio arrived together and were so punctual, right on the dot at nine o'clock, that Wolfe and I hadn't yet finished our after-dinner coffee in the office. I was so curious to have a look that I went to answer the door instead of leaving it to Fritz, the chef and house overseer who helps to make Wolfe's days and years a joy forever almost as much as I do.

The first thing that impressed me was that the baritone took the lead crossing the threshold, letting his daughter and his lawyer tag along behind. Since I have occasionally let Lily Rowan share her pair of opera seats with me, James's six feet and broad shoulders and cocky strut were nothing new, but I was surprised that he looked so young, since he must have been close to fifty. He handed me his hat as if taking care of his hat on Monday evening, August 15, was the one

and only thing I had been born for. Unfortunately, I let it drop. Clara made up for it by looking at me. That alone showed she was unusually observant, since one never looks at the flunkey who lets one in; but she saw me drop her father's hat and gave me a glance, and then prolonged the glance until it practically said, "What are you, in disguise? See you later."

That made me feel friendly, but with reserve. Not only was she pale and tense, as Peggy Mion had said, but her blue eyes glistened, and a girl her age shouldn't glisten like that. Nevertheless, I gave her a grin to show that I appreciated the prolonged glance.

Meanwhile, the lawyer, Judge Henry Arnold, had hung up his own hat. During the day I had of course made inquiries on all of them, and had learned that he rated the "Judge" only because he had once been a City Magistrate. Even so, that's what they called him, so the sight of him was a letdown. He was a little sawed-off squirt with a bald head so flat on top you could have kept an ashtray on it, and his nose was pushed in. He must have been better arranged inside than out, since he had quite a list of clients among the higher levels on Broadway.

Taking them to the office and introducing them to Wolfe, I undertook to assign them to some of the yellow chairs, but the baritone spied the red leather one and copped it. I was helping Fritz fill their orders for drinks when the buzzer sounded and I went back to the front.

It was Dr. Nicholas Lloyd. He had no hat, so that point wasn't raised, and I decided that the searching look he aimed at me was merely professional and automatic, to see if I was anemic or diabetic or what. With his lined handsome face and worried dark eyes he looked every inch a doctor and even surgeon, fully up to the classy reputation my inquiries had disclosed. When I ushered him to the office his eyes lighted up at sight of the refreshment table, and he was the best customer—bourbon and water with mint—all evening.

The last two came together—at least, they were on the stoop together when I opened the door. I would probably have given Adele Bosley the red leather chair if James hadn't already copped it. She shook hands and said she had been wanting to meet Archie Goodwin for years, but that was just public relations and went out the other ear. The point is that from my desk I get most of a

profile or three-quarters, but I get the one in the red leather chair full face, and I like a view. Not that Adele Bosley was a pin-up, and she must have been in the fifth or sixth grade when Clara James was born, but her smooth tanned skin and pretty mouth and nice brown eyes were good scenery.

Rupert Grove didn't shake hands, which didn't upset me. He may have been a good manager for Alberto Mion's affairs, but not for his own physique. A man can be fat and still have integrity—as, for instance, Falstaff or Nero Wolfe—but that bird had lost all sense of proportion. His legs were short, and it was all in the middle third of him. If you wanted to be polite and look at his face you had to concentrate. I did so, since I needed to size them all up, and saw nothing worthy of recording but a pair of shrewd and shifty black eyes.

When these two were seated and provided with liquid, Wolfe fired the starting gun. He said he was sorry it had been necessary to ask them to exert themselves on a hot evening, but that the question at issue could be answered fairly and equitably only if all concerned had a voice in it. The responding murmurs went all the way from acquiescence to extreme irritation. Judge Ar-

nold said belligerently that there was no question at legal issue because Mion was dead.

"Nonsense," Wolfe said curtly. "If that were true you, a lawyer, wouldn't have bothered to come. Anyway, the purpose of this meeting is to keep it from becoming a legal issue. Four of you telephoned Mrs. Mion today to ask if I am acting for her, and were told that I am. On her behalf I want to collect the facts. I may as well tell you, without prejudice to her, that she will accept my recommendation. Should I decide that a large sum is due her you may of course contest; but if I form the opinion that she has no claim she will bow to it. Under that responsibility I need all the facts. Therefore—"

"You're not a court," Arnold snapped.

"No, sir, I'm not. If you prefer it in a court you'll get it." Wolfe's eyes moved. "Miss Bosley, would your employers welcome that kind of publicity? Dr. Lloyd, would you rather appear as an expert on the witness stand or talk it over here? Mr. Grove, how would your client feel about it if he were alive? Mr. James, what do you think? You wouldn't relish the publicity either, would you? Particularly since your daughter's name would appear?"

"Why would her name appear?" James demanded in his trained baritone.

Wolfe turned up a palm. "It would be evidence. It would be established that just before you struck Mr. Mion you said to him, 'You let my daughter alone, you bastard.'"

I put my hand in my pocket. I have a rule, justified by experience, that whenever a killer is among those present, or may be, a gun must be handy. Not regarding the back of the third drawer of my desk, where they are kept, as handy enough, the routine is to transfer one to my pocket before guests gather. That was the pocket I put my hand in, knowing how cocky James was. But he didn't leave his chair. He merely blurted, "That's a lie!"

Wolfe grunted. "Ten people heard you say it. That would indeed be publicity, if you denied it under oath and all ten of them, subpoenaed to testify, contradicted you. I honestly think it would be better to discuss it with me."

"What do you want to know?" Judge Arnold demanded.

"The facts. First, the one already moot. When I lie I like to know it. Mr. Grove, you were present when that famous blow was struck. Have I quoted Mr. James correctly?"

"Yes." Grove's voice was a high tenor.

"You heard him say that?"

"Yes."

"Miss Bosley. Did you?"

She looked uncomfortable. "Wouldn't it be better-to—"

"Please. You're not under oath, but I'm merely collecting facts, and I was just told I lied. Did you hear him say that?"

"Yes, I did." Adele's eyes went to James. "I'm sorry, Giff."

"But it's not true!" Clara James cried.

Wolfe rasped at her, "We're all lying?"

I could have warned her, when she gave me that glance in the hall, to look out for him. Not only was she a sophisticated young woman, and not only did she glisten, but her slimness was the kind that comes from not eating enough, and Wolfe absolutely cannot stand people who don't eat enough. I knew he would be down on her from the start.

But she came back at him. "I don't mean that," she said scornfully. "Don't be so touchy! I mean I had lied to my father. What he thought about Alberto and me wasn't true. I was just bragging to him because—it doesn't matter why. Anyway, what I told him wasn't true, and I told him so that night!"

"Which night?"

"When we got home—from the stage party after *Rigoletto*. That was where my father knocked Alberto down, you know, right there on the stage. When we got home I told him that what I said about Alberto and me wasn't true."

"When were you lying, the first time or the second?"

"Don't answer that, my dear," Judge Arnold broke in, lawyering. He looked sternly at Wolfe. "This is all irrelevant. You're welcome to facts, but relevant facts. What Miss James told her father is immaterial."

Wolfe shook his head. "Oh, no." His eyes went from right to left and back again. "Apparently I haven't made it plain. Mrs. Mion wants me to decide for her whether she has a just claim, not so much legally as morally. If it appears that Mr. James's assault on Mr. Mion was morally justified that will be a factor in my decision."

He focused on Clara. "Whether my question was relevant or not, Miss James, I admit it was embarrassing and therefore invited mendacity. I withdraw it. Try this instead. Had you, prior to that stage party, given your father to understand that Mr. Mion had seduced you?"

"Well—" Clara laughed. It was a tinkly soprano laugh,

rather attractive. "What a nice old-fashioned way to say it! Yes, I had. But it wasn't true."

"But you believed it, Mr. James?"

Gifford James was having trouble holding himself in, and I concede that such leading questions from a stranger about his daughter's honor must have been hard to take. But after all it wasn't new to the rest of the audience, and anyway it sure was relevant. He forced himself to speak with quiet dignity. "I believed what my daughter told me, yes."

Wolfe nodded. "So much for that," he said in a relieved tone. "I'm glad that part is over with." His eyes moved. "Now, Mr. Grove, tell me about the conference in Mr. Mion's studio, a few hours before he died."

Rupert the Fat had his head tilted to one side, with his shrewd black eyes meeting Wolfe's. "It was for the purpose," he said in his high tenor, "of discussing the demand Mion had made for payment of damages."

"You were there?"

"I was, naturally. I was Mion's adviser and manager. Also Miss Bosley, Dr. Lloyd, Mr. James, and Judge Arnold."

"Who arranged the conference, you?"

"In a way, yes. Judge Arnold

suggested it, and I told Mion and phoned Dr. Lloyd and Miss Bosley."

"What was decided?"

"Nothing. That is, nothing definite. There was the question of the extent of the damage—how soon Mion would be able to sing again."

"What was your position?"

Grove's eyes tightened. "Didn't I say I was Mion's manager?"

"Certainly. I mean, what position did you take regarding the payment of damages?"

"I thought a preliminary payment of fifty thousand dollars should be made at once. Even if Mion's voice was soon all right he had already lost that and more. His South American tour had been canceled, and he had been unable to make a lot of records on contract—"

"Nothing like fifty thousand dollars," Judge Arnold asserted aggressively. There was nothing wrong with his larynx, small as he was. "I showed figures—"

"To hell with your figures! Anybody can—"

"Please!" Wolfe rapped on his desk with a knuckle. "What was Mr. Mion's position?"

"The same as mine, of course." Grove was scowling at Arnold as he spoke to Wolfe. "We had discussed it."

"Naturally." Wolfe's eyes went left. "How did you feel

about it, Mr. James?"

"I think," Judge Arnold broke in, "that I should speak for my client. You agree, Giff?"

"Go ahead," the baritone muttered.

Arnold did, and took most of one of the three hours. I was surprised that Wolfe didn't stop him, and finally decided that he let him ramble on just to get additional support for his long-standing opinion of lawyers. If so, he got it.

Arnold covered everything. He had a lot to say about tort-feasors, going back a couple of centuries, with emphasis on the mental state of a tort-feasor. Another item he covered at length was proximate cause. He got really worked up about proximate cause, but it was so involved that I lost track.

Here and there, though, he made sense. At one point he said, "The idea of a preliminary payment, as they called it, was clearly inadmissible. It is not reasonable to expect a man, even if he stipulates an obligation, to make a payment thereon until either the total amount of the obligation, or an exact method of computing it, has been agreed upon."

At another point he said, "The demand for so large a sum can, in fact, be properly characterized as blackmail.

They knew that if the action went to trial, and if we showed that my client's deed sprang from his knowledge that his daughter had been wronged, a jury would not be likely to award damages. But they also knew that we would be averse to making that defense."

"Not his knowledge," Wolfe objected. "Merely his belief. His daughter says she had misinformed him."

"We could have showed knowledge," Arnold insisted.

I looked at Clara with my brows up. She was being contradicted flatly on the chronology of her lie and her truth, but either she and her father didn't get the implication of it or they didn't want to get started on that again.

At another point Arnold said, "Even if my client's deed was tortious and damages would be collectible, the amount could not be agreed upon until the extent of the injury was known. We offered, without prejudice, twenty thousand dollars in full settlement, for a general release. They refused. They wanted a payment forthwith on account. We refused that on principle. In the end there was agreement on only one thing: that an effort should be made to arrive at the total amount of damage. Of course that was what Dr. Lloyd

was there for. He was asked for a prognosis, and he stated that—but you don't need to take hearsay. He's here, and you can get it direct."

Wolfe nodded. "If you please, Doctor?"

I thought, my God, here we go again with another expert.

But Lloyd had mercy on us. He kept it down to our level and didn't take anything like an hour. Before he spoke he took another swallow from his third helping of bourbon and water with mint, which had smoothed out some of the lines on his handsome face and taken some of the worry from his eyes.

"I'll try to remember," he said slowly, "exactly what I told them. First, I described the damage the blow had done. The thyroid and arytenoid cartilages on the left side had been severely injured, and to a lesser extent the cricoid." He smiled—a superior smile, but not supercilious. "I waited two weeks, using indicated treatment, thinking an operation might not be required, but it was. When I got inside I confess I was relieved; it wasn't as bad as I had feared. It was a simple operation, and he healed admirably. I wouldn't have been risking much that day if I had given assurance that his voice would be as good as ever in two months, three at the

most; but the larynx is an extremely delicate instrument, and a tenor like Mion's is a remarkable phenomenon, so I was cautious enough merely to say that I would be surprised and disappointed if he wasn't ready, fully ready, for the opening of the next opera season, seven months from then. I added that my hope and expectation were actually more optimistic than that."

Lloyd pursed his lips. "That was it, I think. Nevertheless, I welcomed the suggestion that my prognosis should be reinforced by Rentner's. Apparently it would be a major factor in the decision about the amount to be paid in damages, and I didn't want the sole responsibility."

"Rentner? Who was he?" Wolfe asked.

"Dr. Abraham Rentner of Mount Sinai," Lloyd replied, in the tone I would use if someone asked me who Mickey Mantle was. "I phoned him and made an appointment for the following morning."

"I insisted on it," Rupert the Fat said importantly. "Mion had a right to collect not sometime in the distant future, but then and there. They wouldn't pay unless a total was agreed on, and if we had to name a total I wanted to be damn sure it was enough. Don't

forget that that day Mion couldn't sing a note."

"He wouldn't have been able to let out a pianissimo for at least two months," Lloyd bore him out. "I gave that as the minimum."

"There seems," Judge Arnold interposed, "to be an implication that we opposed the suggestion that a second professional opinion be secured. I must protest—"

"You did!" Grove squeaked.

"We did not!" Gifford James barked. "We merely—"

The three of them went at it, snapping and snarling. It seemed to me that they might have saved their energy for the big issue—was anything coming to Mrs. Mion and if so how much. But not those babies. Their main concern was to avoid the slightest risk of agreeing on anything at all.

Wolfe patiently let them get where they were headed for—nowhere—and then invited a new voice in. He turned to Adele and spoke.

"Miss Bosley, we haven't heard from you. Which side were you on?"

Adele Bosley had been taking it in, sipping occasionally at her rum Collins—her second one—and looking, I thought, pretty damn intelligent. Though it was the middle of August, she was the only one of the six who

had a really good tan. Her public relations with the sun were excellent.

She shook her head. "I wasn't on either side, Mr. Wolfe. My only interest was that of my employer, the Metropolitan Opera Association. Naturally we wanted it settled privately, without any scandal. I had no opinion whatever on whether—on the point at issue."

"And expressed none?"

"No. I merely urged them to get it settled if possible."

"Fair enough!" Clara James blurted. It was a sneer. "You might have helped my father a little, since he got your job for you. Or had you—"

"Be quiet, Clara!" James told her with authority.

But she ignored him and finished it. "Or had you already paid in full for that?"

Judge Arnold looked pained. Rupert the Fat giggled. Dr. Lloyd took a gulp of bourbon and water.

In view of the mildly friendly attitude I was developing toward Adele I sort of hoped she would throw something at the slim and glistening Miss James, but all she did was appeal to the father: "Can't you handle the brat, Giff?"

Then, without waiting for an answer, she turned to Wolfe. "Miss James likes to use her

imagination. What she implied is not on the record. Not anybody's record."

Wolfe nodded. "It wouldn't belong on this one anyhow." He made a face. "To go back to relevancies, what time did that conference break up?"

"Why—Mr. James and Judge Arnold left first, around four-thirty. Then Dr. Lloyd, soon after. I stayed a few minutes with Mion and Mr. Grove, and then went."

"Where did you go?"

"To my office, on Broadway."

"How long did you stay at your office?"

She looked surprised. "I don't know—yes, I do too, of course. Until a little after seven. I had things to do, and I typed a confidential report of the conference at Mion's."

"Did you see Mion again before he died? Or phone him?"

"See him?" She was more surprised. "How could I? Don't you know he was found dead at seven o'clock? That was before I left the office."

"Did you phone him? Between four-thirty and seven?"

"No." Adele was puzzled and slightly exasperated. It struck me that Wolfe was recklessly getting onto thin ice, mighty close to the forbidden

subject of murder. Adele added, "I don't know what you're getting at."

"Neither do I," Judge Arnold put in with emphasis. He smiled sarcastically. "Unless it's force of habit with you, asking people where they were at the time a death by violence occurred. Why don't you go after all of us?"

"That's what I intend to do," Wolfe said imperturbably. "I would like to know why Mion decided to kill himself, because that has a bearing on the opinion I shall give his widow. I understand that two or three of you have said that he was wrought up when that conference ended, but not despondent. I know he committed suicide; the police can't be flummoxed on a thing like that. But why?"

"I doubt," Adele Bosley offered, "if you know how a singer—especially a great artist like Mion—how he feels when he can't let a sound out, when he can't even talk except in an undertone or a whisper. It's horrible."

"Anyway, you never knew with him," Rupert Grove contributed. "In rehearsal I've heard him do an aria like an angel and then rush out weeping because he thought he had slurred a release. One minute he was up in the sky

and the next he was under a rug."

Wolfe grunted. "Nevertheless, anything said to him by anyone during the two hours preceding his suicide is pertinent to this inquiry—to establish Mrs. Mion's moral position. I want to know where you people were that day, after the conference up to seven o'clock, and what you did."

"My God." Judge Arnold threw up his hands. The hands came down again. "All right, it's getting late. As Miss Bosley told you, my client and I left Mion's studio together. We went to the Churchill bar and drank and talked. A little later Miss James joined us, stayed long enough for a drink, I suppose half an hour, and left. Mr. James and I remained together until after seven. During that time neither of us communicated with Mion, nor arranged for anyone else to. I believe that covers it?"

"Thank you," Wolfe said politely. "You corroborate, of course, Mr. James?"

"I do," the baritone said gruffly. "This is a lot of damn nonsense."

"It does begin to sound like it," Wolfe conceded. "Dr. Lloyd? If you don't mind?"

He hadn't better, since he had been mellowed by four ample helpings of our best

bourbon, and he didn't. "Not at all," he said cooperatively. "I made calls on five patients, two on upper Fifth Avenue, one in the East Sixties, and two at the hospital. I got home a little after six and had just finished dressing after taking a bath when Fred Weppler phoned me about Mion. Of course I went at once."

"You hadn't seen Mion or phoned him?"

"Not since I left after the conference. Perhaps I should have, but I had no idea—I'm not a psychiatrist, but I was his doctor."

"He was mercurial, was he?"

"Yes, he was." Lloyd pursed his lips. "Of course, that's not a medical term."

"Far from it," Wolfe agreed. He shifted his gaze. "Mr. Grove, I don't have to ask you if you phoned Mion, since it is on record that you did. Around five o'clock?"

Rupert the Fat had his head tilted again. Apparently that was his favorite pose for conversing. He corrected Wolfe. "It was after five. More like a quarter-past."

"Where did you phone from?"

"The Harvard Club."

I thought, I'll be damned, it takes all kinds to make a Harvard Club.

"What was said?"

"Not much." Grove's lips twisted. "It's none of your business, you know, but the others have obliged, so I'll string along. I had forgotten to ask him if he would endorse a certain product for a thousand dollars, and the agency wanted an answer. We talked less than three minutes. First, he said he wouldn't, then he said he would. That was all."

"Did he sound like a man getting ready to kill himself?"

"Not in the slightest. He was glum, but naturally, since he still couldn't sing and couldn't expect to for at least two months."

"After you phoned Mion what did you do?"

"I stayed at the club. I ate dinner there and hadn't quite finished when the news came that Mion had killed himself. So I'm still behind that ice cream and coffee."

"That's too bad. When you phoned Mion, did you again try to persuade him not to press his claim against Mr. James?"

Grove's head straightened up. "Did I what?" he demanded.

"You heard me," Wolfe said rudely. "What's surprising about it? Naturally Mrs. Mion has informed me, since I'm working for her. You were opposed to Mion's asking for payment in the first place and

tried to talk him out of it. You said the publicity would be so harmful that it wasn't worth it. He demanded that you support the claim and threatened to cancel your contract if you refused. Isn't that correct?"

"It is not." Grove's black eyes were blazing. "It wasn't like that at all! I merely gave him my opinion. When it was decided to make the claim I went along." His voice went up a notch higher, though I wouldn't have thought it possible. "I certainly did!"

"I see." Wolfe wasn't arguing. "What is your opinion now, about Mrs. Mion's claim?"

"I don't think she has one. I don't believe she can collect. If I were in James's place I certainly wouldn't pay her a cent."

Wolfe nodded. "You don't like her, do you?"

"Frankly, I don't. No. I never have. Do I have to like her?"

"No, indeed. Especially since she doesn't like you either." Wolfe shifted in his chair and leaned back. I could tell from the line of his lips, straightened out, that the next item on the agenda was one he didn't care for, and I understood why when I saw his eyes level at Clara James. I'll bet that if he had known that he would have to be dealing with that type he

wouldn't have taken the job. He spoke to her, testily. "Miss James, you've heard what has been said?"

"I was wondering," she complained, as if she had been holding in a grievance, "if you were going to go on ignoring me. I was around, too, you know."

"I know. I haven't forgotten you." His tone implied that he wished he could. "When you had a drink in the Churchill bar with your father and Judge Arnold, why did they send you up to Mion's studio?"

Arnold and James protested at once, loudly and simultaneously. Wolfe, paying no attention to them, waited to hear Clara, her voice having been drowned by theirs.

"...nothing to do with it," she was finishing. "I sent myself."

"It was your own idea?"

"Entirely. I have one once in a while, all alone."

"What did you go for?"

"You don't need to answer, my dear," Arnold told her.

She ignored him. "They told me what had happened at the conference, and I was mad. I thought it was a holdup—but I wasn't going to tell Alberto that. I thought I could talk him out of it."

"You went to appeal to him for old times' sake?"

She looked pleased. "You have the nicest way of putting things! Imagine a girl my age having old times!"

"I'm glad you like my diction, Miss James." Wolfe was furious. "Anyhow, you went. Arriving at a quarter-past six?"

"Just about, yes."

"Did you see Mion?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He wasn't there. At least—" She stopped. Her eyes weren't listening quite so much. She went on, "That's what I thought then. I went to the thirteenth floor and rang the bell at the door to the studio. It's a loud bell—he had it loud to be heard above his voice and the piano when he was practicing—but I couldn't hear it from the hall because the door is soundproofed, too, and after I had pushed the button a few times I wasn't sure the bell was ringing, so I knocked on the door. I like to finish anything I start, and I thought he must be there, so I rang the bell some more and took off my shoe and pounded on the door with the heel.

"Then I went down to the twelfth floor by the public stairs and rang the bell at the apartment door. That was really stupid, because I know how Mrs. Mion hates me, but anyway I did. She came to the

door and said she thought Alberto was up in the studio, and I said he wasn't, and she shut the door in my face. I went home and mixed myself a drink—which reminds me, I must admit this is good Scotch, though I never heard of it before."

She lifted her glass and jiggled it to swirl the ice. "Any questions?"

"No," Wolfe growled. He glanced at the clock on the wall and then along the line of faces. "I shall certainly report to Mrs. Mion," he told them, "that you were not grudging with the facts."

"And what else?" Arnold inquired.

"I don't know. We'll see."

That they didn't like. I wouldn't have supposed anyone could name a subject on which those six characters would have been in unanimous accord, but Wolfe turned the trick in five words. They wanted a verdict; failing that, an opinion; failing that, at least a hint.

Adele Bosley was stubborn, Rupert the Fat was so indignant he squeaked, and Judge Arnold was next door to nasty. Wolfe was patient up to a point, but finally stood up and told them good night.

The note it ended on was such that before going not one of them shelled out a word of

appreciation for all the refreshment, not even Adele, the expert on public relations, or Dr. Lloyd, who had practically emptied the bourbon bottle.

With the front door locked and bolted for the night, I returned to the office. To my astonishment Wolfe was still on his feet, standing over by the bookshelves, glaring at the spines.

"Restless?" I asked courteously.

He turned and said aggressively, "I want another bottle of beer."

"Nuts. You've had five since dinner." I didn't bother to put much feeling into it, as the routine was familiar. He had himself set the quota of five bottles between dinner and bedtime, and usually stuck to it, but when anything sent his humor far enough down he liked to shift the responsibility so he could be sore at me, too.

It was just part of my job. "Nothing doing," I said firmly. "I counted 'em. Five. What's the trouble, a whole evening gone and still no murderer?"

"Bah." He compressed his lips. "That's not it. If that were all we could close it up before going to bed. It's that confounded gun with wings." He gazed at me with his eyes narrowed, as if suspecting that I had wings, too. "I could, of

course, just ignore it—no. No, in view of the state our clients are in, it would be foolhardy; We'll have to clear it up. There's no alternative."

"That's a nuisance. Can I help any?"

"Yes. Phone Mr. Cramer first thing in the morning. Ask him to be here at eleven o'clock."

My brows went up. "But he's interested only in homicide. Do I tell him we've got one to show him?"

"No. Tell him I guarantee that it's worth the trouble." Wolfe took a step toward me. "Archie."

"Yes, sir."

"I've had a bad evening and I'll have another bottle."

"You will not. Not a chance." Fritz had come in and we were starting to clear up. "It's after midnight and you're in the way. Go to bed."

"One wouldn't hurt him," Fritz muttered.

"You're a help," I said bitterly. "I warn both of you, I've got a gun in my pocket. What a household!"

For nine months of the year Inspector Cramer of Homicide, big and broad and turning gray, looked the part well enough, but in the summertime the heat kept his face so red that he was a little gaudy. He knew it and didn't like it, and as a result

he was harder to deal with in August than in January. If an occasion arises for me to commit a murder in Manhattan I hope it will be winter.

Tuesday at noon he sat in the red leather chair and looked at Wolfe with no geniality. Detained by another appointment, he hadn't been able to make it at eleven, the hour when Wolfe adjourns the morning session with his orchids up in the plant rooms.

Wolfe wasn't exactly beaming either, and I was looking forward to some vaudeville. Also, I was curious to see how Wolfe would go about getting dope on a murder from Cramer without spilling it that there had been one, as Cramer was by no means a nitwit.

"I'm on my way uptown," Cramer grumbled, "and haven't got much time."

That was probably a bare-faced lie. He merely didn't want to admit that an Inspector of the NYPD would call on a private detective on request, even though it was Nero Wolfe and I had told him we had something hot.

"What is it," he grumbled on, "the Dickinson thing? Who brought you in?"

Wolfe shook his head. "No one, thank heaven. It's about the murder of Alberto Mion."

I goggled at him. This was

away beyond me. Right off he had let the dog loose, when I had thought the whole point was that there was no dog on the place.

"Mion?" Cramer wasn't interested. "Not one of mine."

"It soon will be. Alberto Mion, the famous opera singer. Four months ago, on April nineteenth. In his studio on East End Avenue. Shot—"

"Oh." Cramer nodded. "Yeah, I remember. But you're stretching it a little. It was suicide."

"No. It was first-degree murder."

Cramer regarded him for three breaths. Then, in no hurry, he got a cigar from his pocket, inspected it, and stuck it in his mouth. In a moment he took it out again.

"I have never known it to fail," he remarked, "that you can be counted on for a headache. Who says it was murder?"

"I have reached that conclusion."

"Then that's settled." Cramer's sarcasm was usually a little heavy. "Have you bothered any about evidence?"

"I have none."

"Good. Evidence just clutters a murder up." Cramer stuck the cigar back in his mouth and exploded, "When did you start keeping your

sentences so damn short? Go ahead and talk!"

"Well—" Wolfe considered. "It's a little difficult. You're probably not familiar with the details, since it was so long ago and was recorded as suicide."

"I remember it fairly well. As you say, he was famous. Go right ahead."

Wolfe leaned back and closed his eyes. "Interrupt me if you need to. I had six people here for a talk last evening." He pronounced their names and identified them. "Five of them were present at a conference in Mion's studio which ended two hours before he was found dead. The sixth, Miss James, banged on the studio door at a quarter-past six, and got no reply, presumably because he was dead then. My conclusion that Mion was murdered is based on things I have heard said. I'm not going to repeat them to you—because it would take too long, because it's a question of emphasis and interpretation, and because you have already heard them."

"I wasn't here last evening," Cramer said dryly.

"So you weren't. Instead of 'you,' I should have said the Police Department. It must all be in the files. They were questioned at the time it happened, and told their stories as they have told them to me.

You can get it there. Have you ever known me to have to eat my words?"

"I've seen times when I would have liked to shove them down your throat."

"But you never have. Here are three more I shall not eat: Mion was murdered. I won't tell you, now, how I reached that conclusion; study your files."

Cramer was keeping himself under restraint. "I don't have to study them," he declared, "for one detail—how he was killed. Are you saying he fired the gun himself but was driven to it?"

"No. The murderer fired the gun."

"It must have been quite a murderer. It's quite a trick to pry a guy's mouth open and stick a gun in it without getting bit. Would you mind naming the murderer?"

Wolfe shook his head. "I haven't got that far yet. But it isn't the objection you raise that's bothering me; that can be overcome. It's something else." He leaned forward and was earnest. "Look here. It would not have been impossible for me to see this through alone, deliver the murderer and the evidence to you, and flap my wings and crow. But first, I have no ambition to expose you as a zany, since you're not; and second, I need your help. I am

now prepared to prove to

you that Mion was murdered; I can only assure you that he was, and repeat that I won't have to eat it—and neither will you. Isn't that enough, at least to arouse your interest?"

Cramer stopped chewing the cigar. He never lit one. "Sure," he said grimly. "Hell, I'm interested. Another first-class headache. I'm flattered you want me to help. How?"

"I want you to arrest two people as material witnesses, question them, and let them out on bail."

"Which two? Why not all six?" I warned you his sarcasm was hefty.

"But"—Wolfe ignored it—"under clearly defined conditions. They must not know that I am responsible; they must not even know that I have spoken with you. The arrests should be made late this afternoon or early evening, so they'll be kept in custody all night and until they arrange for bail in the morning. The bail need not be high; that's not important. The questioning should be fairly prolonged and severe, not merely a gesture, and if they get little or no sleep so much the better. Of course this sort of thing is routine for you."

"Yeah, we do it constantly." Cramer's tone was unchanged. "But when we ask for a warrant we like to have a fairly good

excuse. We wouldn't like to put down that it's to do Nero Wolfe a favor. I don't want to be contrary."

"There's ample excuse for these two. They *are* material witnesses."

"You haven't named them. Who are they?"

"The man and woman who found the body, Mr. Frederick Weppler, the music critic, and Mrs. Mion, the widow."

This time I didn't goggle, but I had to catch myself quick. It was a first if there ever was one. Time and again I have seen Wolfe go far—on a few occasions, much too far—to keep a client from being pinched. He regards it as an unbearable personal insult. And here he was practically begging the law to haul Fred and Peggy in, when I had deposited her check for five grand only the day before!

"Oh," Cramer said. "Them?"

"Yes, sir," Wolfe assured him. "As you know or can learn from the files, there is plenty to ask them about. Mr. Weppler was there for lunch that day, with others, and when the others left he remained with Mrs. Mion. What was discussed? What did they do that afternoon? Where were they? Why did Mr. Weppler return to the Mion apartment at seven

o'clock? Why did he and Mrs. Mion ascend together to the studio? After finding the body, why did Mr. Weppler go downstairs before notifying the police to get a list of names from the doorman and elevator man? An extraordinary performance. Was it Mion's habit to take an afternoon nap? Did he sleep with his mouth open?"

"Much obliged," Cramer said not gratefully. "You're a wonder at thinking of questions to ask. But even if Mion did take naps with his mouth open, I doubt if he did it standing up. And after the bullet left his head it went up to the ceiling, as I remember it. Now." Cramer put his palms on the arms of the chair. "Who's your client?"

"No," Wolfe said regretfully. "I'm not ready to disclose that."

"I thought not. In fact, there isn't one single damn thing you have disclosed. You've got no evidence, or if you have any you're keeping it under your belt. You've got a conclusion you like, that will help a client you won't name, and you want me to test it for you by arresting two reputable citizens and giving them the works. I've seen samples of your nerve before, but this is tops!"

"I've told you I won't eat it, and neither will you. If—"

"You'd eat one of your own

orchids to earn a fee!"

That started the fireworks. I have sat many times and listened to that pair in a slugging match and enjoyed every minute of it, but this one got so hot that I wasn't exactly sure I was enjoying it. At 12:40 Cramer was on his feet, starting to leave. At 12:45 he was back in the red leather chair, shaking his fist and snarling. At 12:48 Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes shut, pretending he was deaf. At 12:52 he was pounding his desk and bellowing.

At ten-past one it was all over. Cramer had taken it and was gone. He had made a condition—that there would first be a check of the record and a staff talk; but that didn't matter, since the arrests were to be postponed until after judges had gone home. He accepted the proviso that the victims were not to know that Wolfe had a hand in it, so it could have been said that he was knuckling under, but actually he was merely using horse sense.

No matter how much he discounted Wolfe's three words that were not to be eaten—and he knew from experience how risky it was to discount Wolfe just for the hell of it—they made it fairly probable that it wouldn't hurt to give Mion's death another look; and in that

case a session with the couple who had found the body was as good a way to start as any. As a matter of fact, the only detail Cramer choked on was Wolfe's refusal to name his client.

As I followed Wolfe into the dining room for lunch I remarked to his outspread back, "There are already eight hundred and nine people in the metropolitan area who would like to poison you. This will make it eight hundred and eleven. Don't think they won't find out sooner or later."

"Of course they will," he conceded, pulling his chair back. "But too late."

The rest of that day and evening nothing happened at all, as far as we knew.

I was at my desk in the office at 10:40 the next morning when the phone rang. I got it and told the transmitter, "Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking."

"I want to talk to Mr. Wolfe."

"He won't be available until eleven o'clock. Can I help?"

"This is urgent. This is Weppler, Frederick Weppler. I'm in a booth in a drug store on Ninth Avenue near Twentieth Street. Mrs. Mion is with me. We've been arrested."

"Good God!" I was horrified. "What for?"

"To ask us about Mion's death. They had material witness warrants. They kept us all night, and we just got out on bail. I had a lawyer arrange for the bail, but I don't want him to know that we consulted Wolfe, and he's not with us. We want to see Wolfe."

"You sure do," I agreed emphatically. "It's a damn outrage. Come on up here. He'll be down from the plant rooms by the time you arrive. Grab a taxi."

"We can't. That's why I'm phoning. We're being followed by two detectives and we don't want them to know we're seeing Wolfe. How can we shake them?"

It would have saved time and energy to tell him to come ahead, that a couple of official tails needn't worry him, but I thought I'd better play along.

"For God's sake," I said, disgusted. "Cops give me a pain in the neck. Listen. Are you listening?"

"Yes."

"Go to the Feder Paper Company, five thirty-five West Seventeenth Street. In the office ask for Mr. Sol Feder. Tell him your name is Montgomery. He'll conduct you along a passage that exits on Eighteenth Street. Right there, either at the curb or double-parked, will be a taxi with a

handkerchief on the door handle. I'll be in it. Don't lose any time climbing in. Have you got it?"

"I think so. You'd better repeat the address."

I did so, and told him to wait ten minutes before starting, to give me time to get there. Then, after hanging up, I phoned Sol Feder to instruct him, got Wolfe on the house phone to inform him, and beat it.

I should have told him to wait fifteen or twenty minutes instead of ten, because I got to my post on Eighteenth Street barely in time. My taxi had just stopped, and I was reaching out to tie my handkerchief on the door handle when they came across the sidewalk. I swung the door wide, and Fred practically threw Peggy in and dived in after her.

"Okay, driver," I said sternly, "you know where," and we rolled.

As we swung into Tenth Avenue I asked if they had had breakfast and they said yes, not with any enthusiasm. The fact is, they looked as if they were entirely out of enthusiasm. Peggy's lightweight green jacket, which she had on over a tan cotton dress, was rumpled and not very clean, and her face looked neglected. Fred's hair might not have been combed

for a month, and his brown tropical worsted was anything but natty. They sat holding hands, and about once a minute Fred twisted around to look through the rear window.

"We're loose all right," I assured him. "I've been saving Sol Feder just for an emergency like this."

It was only a five-minute ride. When I ushered them into the office Wolfe was there in his big custom-made chair behind his desk. He arose to greet them, invited them to set, asked if they had breakfast properly, and said that the news of their arrest had been an unpleasant shock.

"One thing," Fred blurted, still standing. "We came to see you and consult you in confidence, and forty-eight hours later we were arrested. Was that pure coincidence?"

Wolfe finished getting himself re-established in his chair. "That won't help us any, Mr. Weppler," he said without resentment. "If that's your frame of mind you'd better go somewhere and cool off. You and Mrs. Mion are my clients. An insinuation that I am capable of acting against the interests of a client is too childish for discussion. What did the police ask you about?"

But Fred wasn't satisfied. "You're not a double-crosser,"

he conceded, "I know that. But what about Goodwin here? He may not be a double-crosser either, but he might have got careless in conversation with someone."

Wolfe's eyes moved. "Archie. Did you?"

"No, sir. But he can postpone asking my pardon. They've had a hard night." I looked at Fred. "Sit down and relax. If I had a careless tongue I wouldn't last at this job a week."

"It's damn funny," Fred persisted. He sat. "Mrs. Mion agrees with me. Don't you, Peggy?"

Peggy, in the red leather chair, gave him a glance and then looked back at Wolfe. "I did, I guess," she confessed. "Yes, I did. But now that I'm here, seeing you—" She made a gesture. "Oh, forget it! There's no one else to go to. We know lawyers, of course, but we don't want to tell a lawyer what we know—about the gun. We've already told you. But now the police suspect something, and we're out on bail, and you've got to do something!"

"What did you find out Monday evening?" Fred demanded. "You stalled when I phoned yesterday. What did they say?"

"They recited facts," Wolfe replied. "As I told you on the

phone, I made some progress. I have nothing to add to that—now. But I want to know, I must know, what line the police took with you. Did they know what you told me about the gun?"

They shook their heads.

Wolfe grunted. "Then I might reasonably ask that you withdraw your insinuation that I or Mr. Goodwin betrayed you. What did they ask about?"

The answers to that took a good half hour. The cops hadn't missed a thing that was included in the picture as they knew it, and, with instructions from Cramer to make it thorough, they hadn't left a scrap. Far from limiting it to the day of Mion's death, they had been particularly curious about Peggy's and Fred's feelings and actions during the months, prior and subsequent thereto.

Several times I had to take the tip of my tongue between my teeth to keep from asking the clients why they hadn't told the cops to go soak their heads, but I really knew why: they had been scared. A scared man is only half a man. By the time they finished reporting on their ordeal I was feeling sympathetic, and even a little guilty on behalf of Wolfe, when suddenly he snapped me out of it.

He said abruptly, "Archie.

Draw a check to the order of Mrs. Mion for five thousand dollars."

They gawked at him. I got up and headed for the safe. They demanded to know what the idea was. I stood at the safe door to listen.

"I'm quitting," Wolfe said curtly. "I can't stand you. I told you Sunday that one or both of you were lying and you stubbornly denied it. I undertook to work around your lie, and I did my best. But now that the police have got curious about Mion's death, and specifically about you, I refuse any longer to risk it. I am willing to be a Don Quixote, but not a chump.

"In breaking with you, I should tell you that I shall immediately inform Inspector Cramer of all that you have told me, and also warn you that he knows me well and will believe me. If, when the police start the next round with you, you are fools enough to contradict me, heaven knows what will happen. Your best course will be to acknowledge the truth and let them pursue the investigation you hired me for; but I should also warn you that they are not simpletons and they too will know that you are lying—at least one of you. Archie, what are you standing there gaping for? Get the checkbook!"

I opened the safe door.

Neither of them had uttered a peep. I suppose they were too tired to react normally. As I returned to my desk they just sat, looking at each other. As I started making the entry on the stub, Fred's voice came.

"You can't do this. This isn't ethical."

"Pfui," Wolfe snorted. "You hire me to get you out of a fix, and lie to me about it, and talk of ethics! Incidentally, I did make progress Monday evening. I cleared everything up but two details, but the devil of it is that one of them depends on you. I have to know who put that gun on the floor beside the body. I am convinced that it was one of you, but you won't admit it. So I'm helpless; and that's a pity, because I am also convinced that neither of you was involved in Mion's death. If there were—"

"What's that?" Fred demanded. There was nothing wrong with his reaction now. "You're convinced that neither of us was involved?"

"I am."

Fred was out of his chair. He went to Wolfe's desk, put his palms on it, leaned forward and said harshly, "Do you mean that? Look at me. Open your eyes and look at me! Do you mean that?"

"Yes," Wolfe told him.

"Certainly I mean it."

Fred gazed at him another moment and then straightened up. "All right," he said, the harshness gone. "I put the gun on the floor."

A wail came from Peggy. She sailed out of her chair and to him and seized his arm with both hands. "Fred! No! Fred!" she pleaded. I wouldn't have thought her capable of wailing, but of course she was tired to begin with.

He put a hand on top of hers and then decided that was inadequate and took her in his arms. For a minute he concentrated on her. Finally he turned his face to Wolfe and spoke.

"I may regret this, but if I do you will, too. By God, you will." He was quite positive of it. "All right, I lied. I put the gun on the floor. Now it's up to you." He held the other client closer. "I did, Peggy. Don't say I should have told you—maybe I should—but I couldn't. It'll be all right, dearest, really it will—"

"Sit down," Wolfe said crossly. After a moment he made it an order. "Confound it, sit down!"

Peggy freed herself, Fred letting her go, and returned to her chair and dropped into it. Fred perched on its arm, with a hand on her far shoulder, and

she put her hand up to his. Their eyes, suspicious, afraid, defiant, and hopeful all at once, were on Wolfe.

He stayed cross. "I assume," he said, "that you see how it is. You haven't impressed me. I already knew one of you had put the gun there. How could anyone else have entered the studio during those few minutes? The truth you have told me will be worse than useless, it will be extremely dangerous, unless you follow it with more truth. Try another lie and there's no telling what will happen; I might not be able to save you. Where did you find it?"

"Don't worry," Fred said quietly. "You've screwed it out of me and you'll get it straight. When we went in and found the body I saw the gun where Mion always kept it—on the base of Caruso's bust. Mrs. Mion didn't see it; she didn't look that way. When I left her in her bedroom I went back up. I picked the gun up by the trigger guard and smelled it; it had been fired. I put it on the floor by the body, returned to the apartment, went out, and took the elevator to the ground floor. The rest was just as I told you on Sunday."

Wolfe grunted. "You may have been in love, but you didn't think much of her

intelligence. You assumed that after killing him she hadn't had the wit to leave the gun where he might have dropped—"

"I did not, damn you!"

"Nonsense. Of course you did. Who else would you have wanted to shield? And afterwards it got you in a pickle. When you had to agree with her that the gun hadn't been there when you and she entered, you were hobbled. You didn't dare tell her what you had done because of the implication that you suspected her, especially when she seemed to be suspecting you. You couldn't be sure whether she really did suspect you, or whether she was only—"

"I never did suspect him," Peggy said firmly. It was a job to make her voice firm, but she managed it. "And he never suspected me, not really. We just weren't sure—sure all the way down—and when you're in love and want it to last you've got to be sure."

"That was it," Fred agreed. They were looking at each other. "That was it exactly."

"All right, I'll take this," Wolfe said curtly. "I think you've told the truth, Mr. Weppler."

"I know damn well I have."

Wolfe nodded. "You sound like it. I have a good ear for the truth. Now take Mrs. Mion

home. I've got to work, but first I must think it over. As I said, there were two details, and you've disposed of only one. You can't help with the other. Go home and eat something."

"Who wants to eat?" Fred demanded fiercely. "We want to know what you're going to do!"

"I've got to brush my teeth," Peggy stated. I shot her a glance of admiration and affection. Women's saying things like that at times like that is one of the reasons I enjoy their company. No man alive, under those circumstances, would have felt that he had to brush his teeth and said so.

Besides, it made it easier to get rid of them without being rude. Fred tried to insist that they had a right to know what the program was, and to help consider the prospects, but was finally compelled to accept Wolfe's mandate that when a man hired an expert the only authority he kept was the right to fire. That, combined with Peggy's longing for a tooth-brush and Wolfe's assurance that he would keep them informed, got them on their way without a ruckus.

When, after letting them out, I returned to the office, Wolfe was drumming on his desk blotter with the paperknife, scowling at it, though I had told

him a hundred times that it ruined the blotter. I got the checkbook and replaced it in the safe, having put nothing on the stub but the date, so no harm was done.

"Twenty minutes till lunch," I announced, swiveling my chair and sitting. "Will that be enough to hogtie the second detail?"

No reply.

I refused to be sensitive. "If you don't mind," I inquired pleasantly, "what is the second detail?"

Again no reply, but after a moment he dropped the paperknife, leaned back, and sighed clear down.

"That confounded gun," he growled. "How did it get from the floor to the bust? Who moved it?"

I stared at him. "My God," I complained, "you're hard to satisfy. You've just had two clients arrested and worked like a dog getting the gun *from* the bust *to* the floor. Now you want to get it *from* the floor *to* the bust again? What the hell!"

"Not again. Prior to."

"Prior to what?"

"To the discovery of the body." His eyes slanted at me. "What do you think of this? A man—or a woman, no matter which—entered the studio and killed Mion in a manner that would convey a strong pre-

sumption of suicide. He or she deliberately planned it that way; it's not as difficult as the traditional police theory assumes. Then he or she placed the gun on the base of the bust, twenty feet away from the body, and departed. What do you think of it?"

"I don't think; I know. It didn't happen that way, unless he suddenly went batty after he pulled the trigger, which seems far-fetched."

"Precisely. Having planned it to look like suicide, the murderer placed the gun on the floor near the body. This is not discussible. But Mr. Weppler found it on the bust. Who took it from the floor and put it there, and when and why?"

"Yeah." I scratched my nose. "That's annoying. I'll admit the question is relevant and material, but why the hell do you let it in? Why don't you let it lay? Get him or her pinched, indicted, and tried. The cops will testify that the gun was there on the floor, and that will suit the jury fine, since it was framed for suicide. Verdict, provided you've sewed up things like motive and opportunity, guilty." I waved a hand. "Simple. Why bring up at all about the gun being so fidgety?"

Wolfe grunted. "The clients. I have to earn my fee. They

want their minds cleared, and they know the gun wasn't on the floor when they discovered the body. For the jury, I can't leave it that the gun was on the bust, and for the clients I can't leave it that it stayed on the floor where the murderer put it. Having, through Mr. Weppler, got it from the bust to the floor, I must now go back and get it from the floor to the bust. You see that?"

"Only too plain." I whistled for help. "I'll be damned. How're you coming on?"

"I've just started." He sat up straight. "But I must clear my own mind, for lunch. Please hand me Mr. Shanks's orchid catalogue."

That was all for the moment, and during meals Wolfe excludes business not only from the conversation but also from the air. After lunch he returned to the office and got comfortable in his chair. For a while he just sat, and then began pushing his lips out and in, and I knew he was doing hard labor.

Having no idea how he proposed to move the gun from the floor to the bust, I was wondering how long it might take, and whether he would have to get Cramer to arrest someone else, and if so who. I have seen him sit there like that, working, for hours on end, but this time twenty minutes

did it. It wasn't three o'clock when he pronounced my name gruffly and opened his eyes.

"Archie."

"Yes, sir."

"I can't do this. You'll have to."

"You mean dope it? I'm sorry, I'm busy."

"I mean execute it." He made a face. "I will not undertake to handle that young woman. It would be an ordeal, and I might botch it. It's just the thing for you. Your notebook. I'll dictate a document and then we'll discuss it."

"Yes, sir. I wouldn't call Miss Bosley really young."

"Not Miss Bosley. Miss James."

"Oh." I got the notebook.

At a quarter-past four, Wolfe having gone up to the plant rooms for his afternoon session with the orchids, I sat at my desk, glowering at the phone, feeling the way I imagine Roger Maris feels when he strikes out with the bases full. I had phoned Clara James to ask her to come for a ride with me in the convertible, and she had pushed my nose in.

If that sounds as if I like myself beyond reason, not so. I am quite aware that I bat close to a thousand on invitations to damsels only because I don't issue one unless the circumstances strongly indicate that it

will be accepted. But that has got me accustomed to hearing yes, and therefore it was a rude shock to listen to her unqualified no.

I concocted three schemes and rejected them, concocted a fourth and bought it, reached for the phone, and dialed the number again. Clara's voice answered, as it had before. As soon as she learned who it was she got impatient.

"I told you I had a cocktail date! Please don't—"

"Hold it," I told her bluntly. "I made a mistake. I was being kind. I wanted to get you out into the nice open air before I told you the bad news. I—"

"What bad news?"

"A woman just told Mr. Wolfe and me that there are five people besides her, and maybe more, who know you had a key to Alberto Mion's studio door."

Silence. Sometimes silences irritate me, but I didn't mind this one. Finally her voice came, totally different. "It's a silly lie. Who told you?"

"I forget. And I'm not discussing it on the phone. Two things and two only. First, if this gets around, what about your banging on the door for ten minutes, trying to get in, while he was in there dead? When you had a key? It would make even a cop skeptical. Second, meet me at the

Churchill bar at five sharp and we'll talk it over. Yes or no."

"But this is so—you're so—"

"Hold it. No good. Yes or no."

Another silence, shorter, and then, "Yes," and she hung up.

I never keep a woman waiting and saw no reason to make an exception of this one, so I got to the Churchill bar eight minutes ahead of time. It was spacious, air-conditioned, well-fitted in all respects, and even in the middle of August well-fitted also in the matter of customers, male and female.

I strolled through, glancing around but not expecting her yet, and was surprised when I heard my name and saw her in a booth. Of course she hadn't had far to come, but even so she had wasted no time. She already had a drink and it was nearly gone. I joined her and immediately a waiter was there.

"You're having?" I asked her.

"Scotch on the rocks."

I told the waiter to bring two and he went.

She leaned forward at me and began in a breath, "Listen, this is absolutely silly, you just tell me who told you that, why, it's absolutely crazy—"

"Wait a minute." I stopped her more with my eyes than my words. Hers were glistening at me. "That's not the way to

start, because it won't get us anywhere." I got a paper from my pocket and unfolded it. It was a neatly typed copy of the document Wolfe had dictated. "The quickest and easiest way will be for you to read this first, then you'll know what it's about."

I handed her the paper. You might as well read it while she does. It was dated that day:

*I, Clara Jamés, hereby declare that on Tuesday, April 19, I entered the apartment house at 620 East End Avenue, New York City, at or about 6:15 p.m., and took the elevator to the 13th floor. I rang the bell at the door of the studio of Alberto Mion. No one came to the door and there was no sound from within.*

*The door was not quite closed. It was not open enough to show a crack, but was not latched or locked. After ringing again and getting no response, I opened the door and entered.*

*Alberto Mion's body was lying on the floor near the piano. He was dead. There was a hole in the top of his head. There was no question whether he was dead. I got dizzy and had to sit down on the floor and put my head down to keep from fainting. I didn't touch the body. There was a revolver on the floor, not far from the*

*body, and I picked it up.*

*I think I sat on the floor about five minutes, but it might have been a little more or less. When I got back on my feet and started for the door I became aware that the revolver was still in my hand. I placed it on the base of the bust of Caruso. Later I realized I shouldn't have done that, but at the time I was too shocked and dazed to know what I was doing.*

*I left the studio, pulling the door shut behind me, went down the public stairs to the twelfth floor, and rang the bell at the door of the Mion apartment. I intended to tell Mrs. Mion about it, but when she appeared there in the doorway it was impossible to get it out. I couldn't tell her that her husband was up in the studio, dead.*

*Later, I regretted this, but I now see no reason to regret it or apologize for it, and I simply could not get the words out. I said I had wanted to see her husband, and had rung the bell at the studio and no one had answered. Then I rang for the elevator and went down to the street and went home.*

*Having been unable to tell Mrs. Mion, I told no one. I would have told my father, but he wasn't at home. I decided to wait until he returned and tell him, but before he came a*

*friend telephoned me the news that Mion had killed himself, so I decided not to tell anyone, not even my father, that I had been in the studio, but to say that I had rung the bell and knocked on the door and got no reply. I thought that would make no difference, but it has now been explained to me that it does, and therefore I am stating it exactly as it happened.*

As she got to the end the waiter came with the drinks, and she held the document against her chest as if it were a poker hand. Keeping it there with her left, she reached for the glass with her right and took a big swallow of Scotch. I took a sip of mine to be sociable.

"It's a pack of lies," she said indignantly.

"It sure is," I agreed. "I have good ears, so keep your voice down. Mr. Wolfe is perfectly willing to give you a break, and anyhow it would be a job to get you to sign it if it told the truth. We are quite aware that the studio door was locked and you opened it with your key. Also that—no, listen to me a minute—also that you purposefully picked up the gun and put it on the bust because you thought Mrs. Mion had killed him and left the gun there so it

would look like suicide, and you wanted to mess it up for her. You couldn't—"

"Where were you?" she demanded scornfully. "Hiding behind the couch?"

"Nuts. If you didn't have a key why did you break a date to see me because of what I said on the phone? As for the gun, you couldn't have been dumber if you'd worked at it for a year. Who would believe anyone had shot him so it would look like suicide and then been fool enough to put the gun on the bust? Too dumb to believe, honest, but you did it."

She was too busy with her brain to resent being called dumb. Her frown creased her smooth pale forehead and took the glisten from her eyes. "Anyway," she protested, "what this says not only isn't true, it's impossible! They found the gun on the floor by his body, so this couldn't be true!"

"Yeah." I grinned at her. "It must have been a shock when you read that in the paper. Since you had personally moved the gun to the bust, how come they found it on the floor? Obviously someone had moved it back. I suppose you decided that Mrs. Mion had done that, too, and it must have been hard to keep your mouth shut, but you had to. Now it's a

little different. Mr. Wolfe knows who put the gun back on the floor and he can prove it. What's more, he knows Mion was murdered and he can prove that, too. All that stops him is the detail of explaining how the gun got from the floor to the bust." I got out my fountain pen. "Put your name to that, and I'll witness it, and we're all set."

"You mean sign this thing?" She was contemptuous. "I'm not *that* dumb."

I caught the waiter's eye and signaled for refills, and then, to keep her company, emptied my glass.

I met her gaze, matching her frown. "Look, Blue Eyes," I told her reasonably, "I'm not sticking needles under your nails. I'm not saying we can prove you entered the studio—whether with your key or because the door wasn't locked doesn't matter—and moved the gun. We know you did, since no one else could have and you were there at the right time, but I admit we can't prove it. However, I'm offering you a wonderful bargain."

I pointed the pen at her. "Just listen. All we want this statement for is to keep it in reserve, in case the person who put the gun back on the floor is fool enough to blab it, which is very unlikely. He would only

be—”

“You say he?” she demanded.

“Make it he or she. As Mr. Wolfe says, the language could use another pronoun. He would only be making trouble for himself. If he doesn’t spill it, and he won’t, your statement won’t be used at all, but we’ve got to have it in the safe in case he does. Another thing, if we have this statement we won’t feel obliged to pass it along to the cops about your having had a key to the studio door. We wouldn’t be interested in keys. Still another, you’ll be saying your father a big chunk of dough. If you sign this statement we can clear up the matter of Mion’s death, and if we do that I guarantee that Mrs. Mion will be in no frame of mind to push any claim against your father. She will be too busy with a certain matter.”

I proffered the pen. “Go ahead and sign it.”

She shook her head, but not with much energy because her brain was working again. Fully appreciating the fact that her thinking was not on the tournament level, I was patient. Then the refills came and there was a recess, since she couldn’t be expected to think and drink all at once. But finally she fought her way through to the point I had aimed at.

“So you know,” she declared with satisfaction.

“We know enough,” I said darkly.

“You know she killed him. You know she put the gun back on the floor. I knew that, too, I knew she must have. And now you can prove it? If I sign this you can prove it??”

Of course I could have covered it with double talk, but I thought what the hell. “We certainly can,” I assured her. “With this statement we’re ready to go. It’s the missing link. Here’s the pen.”

She lifted her glass, drained it, put it down, and damned if she didn’t shake her head again, this time with energy.

“No,” she said flatly, “I won’t.” She extended a hand with the document in it. “I admit it’s all true, and when you get her on trial if she says she put the gun back on the floor I’ll come and swear to it that I put it on the bust, but I won’t sign anything because once I signed something about an accident and my father made me promise that I would never sign anything again without showing it to him first. I could take it and show it to him and then sign it, and you could come for it tonight or tomorrow.” She frowned. “Except that he knows I had a key, but I could explain that.”

But she no longer had the document. I had reached and taken it. You are welcome to think I should have changed holds on her and gone on fighting, but you weren't there seeing and hearing her, and I was. I gave up. I got out my pocket notebook, tore out a page, and began writing on it.

"I could use another drink," she stated.

"In a minute," I mumbled, and went on writing, as follows:

*To Nero Wolfe:*

*I hereby declare that Archie Goodwin has tried his best to persuade me to sign the statement you wrote, and explained its purpose to me; and I have told him why I must refuse to sign it:*

"There," I said, handing it to her. "That won't be signing something; it's just stating that you refuse to sign something. The reason I've got to have it, Mr. Wolfe knows how beautiful girls appeal to me, especially sophisticated girls like you, and if I take that thing back to him unsigned he'll think I didn't even try. He might even fire me. Just write your name there at the bottom."

She read it over again and took the pen. She smiled at me, glistening. "You're not kidding me any," she said, not

unfriendly. "I know when I appeal to a man. You think I'm cold and calculating."

"Yeah?" I made it a little bitter, but not too bitter. "Anyhow, it's not the point whether you appeal to me but what Mr. Wolfe will think. It'll help a lot to have that. Much obliged." I took the paper from her and blew on her signature to dry it.

"I know when I appeal to a man," she repeated.

There wasn't another thing there I wanted, but I had practically promised to buy her another drink, so I did so.

It was after six when I got back to West Thirty-fifth Street, so Wolfe had finished in the plant rooms and was down in the office. I marched in and put the unsigned statement on his desk in front of him.

He grunted. "Well?"

I sat down and told him exactly how it had gone, up to the point where she had offered to take the document home and show it to her father.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but some of her outstanding qualities didn't show much in that crowd the other evening. I give this not as an excuse but merely a fact. Her mental operations could easily be carried on inside a hollowed-out pea. Knowing what you think of unsupported statements, and wanting to

convince you of the truth of that one, I got evidence to back it up. Here's a paper she did sign."

I handed him the page I had torn from my notebook. He took a look at it and then cocked an eye at me.

"She signed this?"

"Yes, sir. In my presence."

"Indeed. Good. Satisfactory."

I acknowledged the tribute with a careless nod. It does not hurt my feelings when he says, "Satisfactory," like that.

"A bold easy hand," he said. "She used your pen?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I have it, please?"

I arose and handed it to him, together with a couple of sheets of typewriter paper, and stood and watched with interested approval as he wrote "Clara James" over and over again, comparing each attempt with the sample I had secured. Meanwhile, at intervals, he spoke.

"It's highly unlikely that anyone will ever see it—except our clients... That's better... There's time to phone all of them before dinner—first Mrs. Mion and Mr. Weppler—then the others... Tell them my opinion is ready on Mrs. Mion's claim against Mr. James... If they can come at nine this evening—if that's impos-

sible tomorrow morning at eleven will do... then get Mr. Cramer... Tell him it might be well to bring one of his men along..."

He flattened the typed statement on his desk blotter, forged Clara James's name at the bottom, and compared it with the true signature which I had provided.

"Faulty, to an expert," he muttered, "but no expert will ever see it. For our clients, even if they know her writing, it will do nicely."

It took a solid hour on the phone to get it fixed for that evening, but I finally managed it. I never did catch up with Gifford James, but his daughter agreed to find him and deliver him. The others I tracked down myself.

The only ones that gave me an argument were the clients, especially Peggy Mion. She balked hard at sitting in at a meeting for the ostensible purpose of collecting from Gifford James, and I had to appeal to Wolfe. Fred and Peggy were invited to come ahead of the others for a private briefing and then decide whether to stay or not. She bought that.

They got there in time to help out with the after-dinner coffee. Peggy had presumably

brushed her teeth and had a nap and a bath, and manifestly she had changed her clothes, but even so she did not sparkle. She was wary, weary, removed, and skeptical. She didn't say in so many words that she wished she had never gone near Nero Wolfe, but she might as well have.

I had a notion that Fred Weppler felt the same way about it but was being gallant and loyal. It was Peggy who had insisted on coming to Wolfe, and Fred didn't want her to feel that he thought she had made things worse instead of better.

They didn't perk up even when Wolfe showed them the statement with Clara James's name signed to it. They read it together, with her in the red leather chair and him perched on the arm.

They looked up together, at Wolfe.

"So what?" Fred demanded.

"My dear sir," Wolfe pushed his cup and saucer back. "My dear madam. Why did you come to me? Because the fact that the gun was not on the floor when you two entered the studio convinced you that Mion had not killed himself but had been murdered. If the circumstances had permitted you to believe that he had killed himself, you would be married by now and never have needed

me. Very well. That is now precisely what the circumstances are. What more do you want? You wanted your minds cleared. I have cleared them."

Fred twisted his lips, tight.

"I don't believe it," Peggy said glumly.

"You don't believe this statement?" Wolfe reached for the document and put it in his desk drawer, which struck me as a wise precaution, since it was getting close to nine o'clock. "Do you think Miss James would sign a thing like that if it weren't true? Why would—"

"I don't mean that," Peggy said. "I mean I don't believe my husband killed himself, no matter where the gun was. I knew him too well. He would never have killed himself—never." She twisted her head to look up at her fellow client. "Would he, Fred?"

"It's hard to believe," Fred admitted grudgingly.

"I see." Wolfe was caustic. "Then the job you hired me for was not as you described it. At least you must concede that I have satisfied you about the gun; you can't wiggle out of that. So that job's done, but now you want more. You want a murder disclosed, which means, of necessity, a murderer caught. You want—"

"I only mean," Peggy

insisted, "that I don't believe he killed himself, and nothing would make me believe it—"

The doorbell sounded, and I went to answer it.

So the clients stayed for the party.

There were ten guests altogether: the six who had been there Monday evening, the two clients, Inspector Cramer, and my old friend and enemy, Sergeant Purley Stebbins. What made it unusual was that the dumbest one of the lot, Clara James, was the only one who had a notion of what was up, unless she had told her father, which I doubted. She had the advantage of the lead I had given her at the Churchill bar.

Adele Bosley, Dr. Lloyd, Rupert Grove, Judge Arnold, and Gifford James had had no reason to suppose there was anything on the agenda but the damage claim against James, until they got there and were made acquainted with Inspector Cramer and Sergeant Stebbins. God only knew what they thought then; one glance at their faces was enough to show they didn't know.

And as for Cramer and Stebbins, they had had enough experience of Nero Wolfe to be aware that almost certainly fur was going to fly; but whose and how and when?

And as for Fred and Peggy, even after the arrival of the law, they probably thought that Wolfe was going to get Mion's suicide pegged down by producing Clara's statement and disclosing what Fred had told us about moving the gun from the bust to the floor, which accounted for the desperate and cornered look on their faces. But now they were stuck.

Wolfe focused on the Inspector, who was seated in the rear over by the big globe, with Purley nearby. "If you don't mind, Mr. Cramer, first I'll clear up a little matter that is outside your interest."

Cramer nodded and shifted the cigar in his mouth to a new angle.

Wolfe changed his focus. "I'm sure you'll all be glad to hear this. Not that I formed my opinion so as to please you; I considered only the merits of the case. Without prejudice to her legal position, I feel that morally Mrs. Mion has no claim on Mr. James. As I said she would, she accepts my judgment. She makes no claim and will ask no payment for damages. You verify that before the witnesses, Mrs. Mion?"

"Certainly." Peggy was going to add something, but stopped it on the way out.

"This is wonderful!" Adele Bosley was out of her chair.

"May I use a phone?"

"Later," Wolfe snapped at her. "Sit down, please."

"It seems to me," Judge Arnold observed, "that this could have been told to us on the phone. I had to cancel an important engagement." Lawyers are never satisfied.

"Quite true," Wolfe agreed mildly, "if that were all. But there's the matter of Mion's death. When I—"

"What had that got to do with it?"

"I'm about to tell you. Surely it isn't extraneous, since his death resulted, though indirectly, from the assault by Mr. James. But my interest goes beyond that. Mrs. Mion hired me not only to decide about the claim of her husband's estate against Mr. James—that is now closed—but also to investigate her husband's death. She was convinced he had not killed himself. She could not believe it was in his character to commit suicide. I have investigated and I am prepared to report to her."

"You don't need us here for that," Rupert the Fat said in a high squeak.

"I need one of you. I need the murderer."

"You still don't need *us*," Arnold said harshly.

"Hang it," Wolfe snapped, "then go! All but one of you. Go!"

Nobody made a move.

Wolfe gave them five seconds. "Then I'll go on," he said dryly. "As I say, I'm prepared to report, but the investigation is not concluded. One vital detail will require official sanction, and that's why Inspector Cramer is present. It will also need Mrs. Mion's concurrence; and I think it well to consult Dr. Lloyd, too, since he signed the death certificate." His eyes went to Peggy. "First you, madam. Will you give your consent to the exhumation of your husband's body?"

She gawked at him. "What for?"

"To get evidence that he was murdered, and by whom. It is a reasonable expectation."

She stopped gawking. "Yes. I don't care." She thought he was just talking to hear himself.

Wolfe's eyes went left. "You have no objection, Dr. Lloyd?"

Lloyd was nonplussed. "I have no idea," he said slowly and distinctly, "what you're getting at, but in any case I have no voice in the matter. I merely issued the certificate."

"Then you won't oppose it. Mr. Cramer, the basis for the request for official sanction will appear in a moment, but you should know that what will be required is an examination and report by Dr. Abraham Rentner of Mount Sinai Hospital."

"You don't get an exhumation just because you're curious," Cramer growled.

"I know it. I'm more than curious." Wolfe's eyes traveled. "You all know, I suppose, that one of the chief reasons, probably the main one, for the police decision that Mion had committed suicide was the manner of his death. Of course, other details had to fit—for instance, the presence of the gun beside the body—and they did. But the determining factor was the assumption that a man cannot be murdered by sticking the barrel of a revolver in his mouth and pulling the trigger unless he is first made unconscious; and there was no evidence that Mion had been either struck or drugged.

"However, though that assumption is ordinarily sound, surely this case was an exception. It came to my mind at once, when Mrs. Mion first consulted me. For there was present—but I'll show you with a simple demonstration. Archie, get a gun."

I opened my third drawer and got one out.

"Is it loaded?"

I flipped it open to check.

"No, sir."

Wolfe returned to the audience. "You, I think, Mr. James. As an opera singer you should be able to follow stage

directions. Stand up, please. This is a serious matter, so do it right. You are a patient with a sore throat, and Mr. Goodwin is your doctor. He will ask you to open your mouth so he can look at your throat. You are to do exactly what you would naturally do under those circumstances. Will you do that?"

"But it's obvious." James, standing, was looking grim. "I don't need to."

"Nevertheless, please indulge me. There's a certain detail. Will you do it as naturally as possible?"

"Yes."

"Good. Will the rest of you all watch Mr. James's face? Closely. Go ahead, Archie."

With the gun in my pocket I moved in front of James and told him to open wide. He did so. For a moment his eyes came to mine as I peered into his throat, and then slanted upward. Not in a hurry, I took the gun from my pocket and poked it into his mouth until it touched the roof. He jerked back and dropped into his chair.

"Did you see the gun?" Wolfe demanded.

"No. My eyes were up."

"Just so." Wolfe looked at the others. "You saw his eyes go up? They always do. Try it yourselves some time. I tried it

in my bedroom Sunday evening. So it is by no means impossible to kill a man that way. It isn't even difficult, if you're his doctor and he has something wrong with his throat. You agree, Dr. Lloyd?"

Dr. Lloyd had not joined the general movement to watch James's face during the demonstration. He hadn't stirred a muscle. Now his jaw was twitching a little, but that was all.

He did his best to smile. "To show that a thing could happen," he said in a pretty good voice, "isn't the same thing as proving it did happen."

"Indeed it isn't," Wolfe conceded. "Though we do have some facts. You have no effective alibi: Mion would have admitted you to his studio at any time without question. You could have managed easily to get the gun from the base of Caruso's bust, and slipped it into your pocket without being seen. For you, as for no one else, he would upon request have stood with his mouth wide open, inviting his doom. He was killed shortly after you had been compelled to make an appointment for Dr. Rentner to examine him. We do have those facts, don't we?"

"They prove nothing," Dr. Lloyd insisted. His voice was not quite as good now. He came

out of his chair to his feet. It did not look as if the movement had any purpose; apparently he simply couldn't stay put in his chair, and the muscles had acted on their own. And it had been a mistake because, standing upright, he began to tremble.

"They'll help," Wolfe told him, "if we can get one more—and I suspect we can, or what are you quivering about? What was it, Doctor? Some unfortunate blunder? Had you botched the operation and ruined his voice forever? I suppose that was it, since the threat to your reputation and career was grave enough to make you resort to murder. Anyhow, we'll soon know, when Dr. Rentner makes his examination and reports. I don't expect you to furnish—"

"It wasn't a blunder!" Lloyd squawked. "It could have happened to anyone—"

Whereupon he did blunder. I think what made him lose his head completely was hearing his own voice and realizing it was a hysterical squawk.

He made a dash for the door.

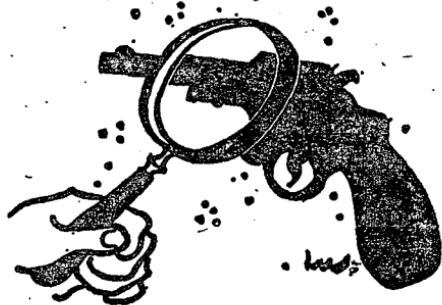
I knocked Judge Arnold down in my rush across the room, which was unnecessary, for by the time I arrived Purley Stebbins had Dr. Lloyd by the collar, and Cramer was there, too.

## THE GUN WITH WINGS

Hearing a commotion behind me, I turned around. Clara James had made a dive for Peggy Mion, screeching something I didn't catch, but her father and Adele Bosley had stopped her and were getting her under control. Judge Arnold and Rupert the Fat were excitedly telling Wolfe

how wonderful he was. Peggy was apparently weeping, from the way her shoulders were shaking, but I couldn't see her face because it was buried on Fred's shoulder, and his arm had her tight.

Nobody wanted me or needed me, so I went to the kitchen for a glass of milk.



# **Victor Canning**

## **The Trojan Crate**

*A Minerva Club story: Dog Downey was a master at his trade—dognapping. But then he got a chance to go up in the world—to become Maxy Martingale's crate man . . .*

### **Criminal: DOG DOWNEY**

**A**s Milky Waye, the secretary of the Minerva Club, was fond of saying, of all the members of the Club there was not one who could come up to Dog Downey for sheer goodness of heart. But as far as intelligence went, Dog was a long way from the top class. Mostly he worked in a minor capacity for other members of the Club. The only thing he did on his own was dog stealing—what might be called dognapping—at which he was an acknowledged master. Downey loved and understood dogs more than he did any creature, four- or two-legged. He could do anything with them.

Downey was a short, ugly man with a great mop of brown hair that fell forward across his face and gave him a shaggy look. Women, seeing him coming, would cross the road—which was a great pity for

Downey had the utmost respect for women, though he had long reconciled himself to his bachelor state. At the age of twenty he had qualified for membership in the Club—no member is admitted to the august halls in Brook Street unless he has done at least two years in one of Her Majesty's Prisons.

At the time of this story Downey had just completed a rewarding piece of work. He had stolen a valuable litter of four six-month-old Alsatian pups from a van which was delivering them to Cruft's Dog Show, and he had trained them until they were reliable house dogs and then sold them through an agent of his to various clients at fifty guineas apiece. Each time Downey parted with a dog it was like a sailor's farewell to his bride.

He came into the Minerva Club four days after this, his

face as long as a fiddle with all its strings broken. We tried to cheer him up with brandy but it didn't work. In the end Maxy Martingale offered to take him in on a scheme he had just worked out. You should have seen the light in Downey's eyes at the thought of working with the great Maxy.

Maxy Martingale was brilliant. He was a tall, distinguished man who dressed like a City banker, had a voice like an Archbishop, and the charm of a matinee idol. Dog Downey instantly became one of his men and Downey's warm heart overflowed at Maxy's kindness.

Maxy's scheme was simple, brilliant with the polish of genius, and cheap to operate. Maxy would choose a wealthy house where there was silver, paintings, an easy safe to crack or a fine collection of jewels to pick up—on the outside Maxy moved in good society and was well-informed—and then wait until he knew the owners were away for the night and the place manned only by the house staff. At about half-past five in the afternoon a van would draw up outside the house and a trio of Maxy's men would deliver a large packing case with the label of some big firm on it. The boys would dump the crate in the hall, get a gent to sign for it, and then

be off. While the servant was walking around the crate wondering what was inside, the telephone would ring.

This would be Maxy, apologetic, anxious, smooth as silk, pretending to be an executive of the firm asking if the case had been delivered. Yes, it had. Oh, dear, how unfortunate and annoying—because a mistake had been made in addressing the crate and it was not intended for Mr. So-and-So at all. Regrettably, it was too late now to get the van men to collect it. Would it be terribly inconvenient if the crate stayed there for the night? The van men would pick it up first thing in the morning.

And, of course, Maxy's charm worked and it always was convenient. And inside the crate, of course, would be one of Maxy's men. He would stay there until the house settled down for the night, then he would unfasten the crate, come out, lift the items listed by Maxy, pack himself and the loot back in the crate, screw it up from inside, and the next morning be whipped away by the returning van men before any loss had been discovered by late-rising servants taking advantage of their employer's absence.

Dog became Maxy's crate man—and he did the job well,

no complaints, and made himself more money than he had seen for years. He even bought a new suit, got himself a haircut regularly, and began to bathe daily.

They did a couple of jobs in London, then worked the provincial towns for a few months, and finally came back to do another job in London. Maxy picked the house of a rich stockbroker who had a famous collection of gold and silver snuffboxes for which Maxy knew the right market. Duly at half-past five, Dog was delivered—labeled *Fragile: Handle With Care*—to a house just off Hyde Park and dumped on the hall floor. A few minutes later, Dog heard the telephone ring and a servant answer it, and he knew that it was Maxy doing his stuff. The servant hung up, shuffled round the crate, gave it a nosy tap or two, and then moved away.

Dog sat inside and, an old hand now, patiently waited for time to pass. He used to amuse himself during this period by working out the possibilities from mating one breed of dog with another. On this particular night he was working on the problem of crossing a Portuguese Water Dog and a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and time flew.

Eventually a clock in the hall

struck midnight. Dog opened his thermos, had a cup of tea and a sandwich, and then, slipping on his gloves, he began to unscrew the crate. Five minutes later he was out.

There was one shaded light burning at the foot of a curving marble stairway and the hallway was hung with tapestries and pictures. Dog brushed himself down, tidied his new haircut, and proceeded to work. He was well briefed on the layout. He went across the hall and into a study. In a little burglar-proof glass case was the collection of snuffboxes.

Dog fixed the alarm and lifted the snuffboxes, wrapping each one carefully in tissue paper, and putting the lot into a velvet cloth bag. It was no more than twenty minutes' work.

He went back to the crate and dropped his cloth bag into it. He was just about to get inside himself when a noise from the marble stairway made him turn round. The noise was a familiar, almost beloved one to him. It was the first low inquiring growl of an Alsation demanding an invitation card or else.

Coming slowly down the stairs was a plumpish, rosy-cheeked woman of about thirty-odd, her dark hair done up in curlers, wearing a faded purple dressing gown. Dog put

her down as a housekeeper or a cook. At her side was a large black Alsatian with a small white spot on its forehead, and Downey placed the dog immediately. Once he'd seen a dog he never forgot it, and he recognized this as one of the litter he had stolen a few months before.

Recognizing the dog took some of the apprehension out of Downey. At least, he would have no trouble there. This was Sarah whom he personally had trained. He blessed the coincidence which had placed this particular Alsatian in this house.

The woman, without a word, came slowly down the stairs and across to Dog, staring at him with a far-away, puzzled look—as though she couldn't believe her eyes. The dog kept close to her side.

Dog Downey, always polite to women, and rather pleased that this one hadn't winced at the sight of his face, said, "Good evening, ma'am."

"Good evening. You looka for something?"

Now Dog Downey was no fool. Here was the cook or the housekeeper and from her voice he guessed that she was Italian, and Dog knew that all foreigners were simple souls when it came to understanding English ways.

"That's right, ma'am," he said. "I was passing and just dropped in to see Mr. Whitlow. Old friend of mine." Whitlow was the name of the stock-broker who owned the house.

The woman nodded and said, "Issa good of you, Signore—but Signor Vitlow not here tonight."

"A pity. I thought we might have a noggin together."

"Noggin—whata that?"

"A drinka..." Dog made the motion of drinking and felt completely relaxed. The dog he could deal with—and the woman was a simple Italian who would believe anything. All he had to do was to keep things nice and friendly, take care of the woman somehow, and get out of the house with the snuffboxes. There could be no waiting for the crate to be collected in the morning—not this time.

"A drinka..." The woman smiled. "I show you. Thissa way."

She turned and went across to the back of the hall; the dog at her side cocking an inquiring eye at Downey who followed. A few moments later they were both at a table in the servants' sitting room with some bottles of beer in front of them.

"You're the cook here?" asked Downey.

"Thassa right. Only one

month I come from Milano."

"I come from the Old Kent Road—I know what it's like to be in a strange place without friends," said Downey. "Here, let me fix that." He reached out for the beer and glasses and began to prepare the drinks.

Now it should be explained at this point that, although Downey had changed his line of operations, like a true professional he would never have dreamt of going outside his own house without all the adjuncts of a dog snatcher. After all, who could tell at what moment opportunity might not knock in the shape of a pedigreed Doberman Pinscher looking for a new owner. Downey always carried a knockout pill which could be fed to, say, a reluctant Great Dane. He fished now in his pocket for the pill and slipped it into the woman's drink. In five minutes she would drop off and Dog could safely depart—with the loot.

It must be said for Downey that he didn't like doing it to a woman. He was the last man to treat any woman like a dog—but it had to be done. He raised his glass and she drank with him, and his conscience troubled him. She was such a nice soul, friendly, with big peach-bloom cheeks and a dreamy look in her eyes as though she were still in Italy

among friends who loved her, not here in cold, rainy London.

"Birra," she said, "very good. But *vino* issa better." As she put her glass down, she went on, "Tella me—you always wear gloves like that?"

Dog nodded. "Always." To leave fingerprints about in his work was like leaving a visiting card.

"Is very much gentleman to wear gloves. I like that."

Dog nodded again, and then said, "What's your name?"

"Rosa," she said. "Rosa Caramaggio. Whassa your name?"

"Albert," said Dog truthfully, and then added untruthfully, "Brown."

"Issa nice. Alberto...Alber...Alb..." Her head began to drop and then with a last warm smile she flopped back into the wickerwork armchair and began to snore gently. Dog didn't mind the snoring. It always had that effect on dogs, too.

He sat and gave her a few moments, thinking to himself what a nice creature she was and how lucky he had been to meet someone so out of touch with the world of reality that she thought Mr. Whitlow's friends called long after midnight and got in without opening the front door.

When Rosa was sound asleep, Dog turned to deal with

the Alsatian who, during all this, had been sitting between him and Rosa, awaiting instructions.

Dog didn't try to rush it. Relations had to be established again.

"Well, now, Sarah, me old darling. Nice to see you. Remember Dog? Remember your old daddy, Dog?"

Dog gave a low whistle and Sarah pricked her ears forward, cocked her head on one side, and was obviously making an effort at memory. Dog went on talking to her, giving her the dog patter of which he was a master. He had no doubts of winning Sarah over, and a few moments later, judging the time to be right, he started to stand up.

The first movement from him brought Sarah to all four feet. Her hackles went up and a growl came from her as though she were trying to imitate Etna in eruption. Dog sat down quickly. He was puzzled but not dismayed. He had not established complete recognition, that was all. He gave Sarah some more soft talk and she took it like a lady, relaxed, sitting back on her haunches.

But the moment Dog made another attempt to move, she was on her feet, hackles up again, and a row of fangs showing that would have sent

Little Red Riding Hood into a dead faint. They did something for Dog Downey, too. They stimulated him to an effort of cerebration which finally gave him the answer.

Sarah clearly was having none of Dog's blandishments, and for a good reason that Dog now realized sadly. Dog had never been double-crossed by any of his dogs before and it was a blow. Sarah just didn't recognize him because he was wearing a new suit and had had his hair cut. He might talk like Dog Downey, but he didn't look like Dog Downey, and because of his new bathing habits he didn't smell like Dog Downey—and Sarah was taking no chances. So there was Dog stuck with the dog.

And in the armchair Rosa Caramaggio snored gently, smiling in her sleep. And there the whole matter might have rested until morning when the outside staff arrived—except that Fate, which can be as tricky as a terrier if you hand it the wrong word, decided that Dog had already had more luck than he deserved. Fate now decided to do a little hounding.

Sitting there, wondering what he could possibly do, and not dreaming of tangling with Sarah's fangs, Dog suddenly became aware of a burning smell. The door from the

servants' sitting room into the kitchen was half open. Dog saw a trickle of blue smoke curling around the side of it like a lost genie looking for some wish to grant.

Instinctively he jumped to his feet, and instinctively Sarah was on hers and waiting for one more move. Dog sat down smartly and now he heard the faint whickering noise of flames. He had a situation on his hands. He could sit there and roast, and Sarah and Rosa would roast with him. But he would roast first because he was the nearest to the kitchen door.

Sweat breaking out on his ugly face, Dog decided that he would have to do something no matter how desperate—a woman's life was at stake and that brought out all the Galahad in him. Behind him, in his chair, was a cushion. He carefully slipped it around and onto his knees. Sarah made no objection to movements performed while he sat. She just didn't like him on his feet.

Dog undid the fasteners on the cushion and pulled out the inner pillow. He put the pillow on his left arm and knotted it into place with his tie—ruefully, because the tie was new like his suit.

Then he looked Sarah straight in the eyes and said, "Okay, old lady, you asked for

it, so it's going to be rough—for you, I hope, not for me."

He leaned forward and opened another bottle of beer and poured it into a glass, while Sarah watched with interest. Then he suddenly jerked the beer into Sarah's face. At the same time he came to his feet and went for her, his padded left arm held in front of him like a shield.

Sarah lunged for him through a shower of pale ale, her fangs flashing and a battle growl rumbling in her throat. Her teeth went into the pillow and for a moment she hung from his arm. Dog jerked up his knee, slammed it into her unprotected belly, and Sarah went down in a heap.

In that moment Dog was on top of her and slipped the empty cushion cover over her head, twisting it tightly round her neck, muzzling and gagging her. He lifted her and ran quickly into the hall. Thanks to Maxy's briefing, he knew his way about the house as though he had lived there for years. By the front door was a small cloakroom. He kicked open the door, threw Sarah in, and then slammed the door shut on her.

He ran back across the hall, slipped on the marble tiling, slid five yards, cracked his head against the wall, and was a few seconds recovering. By the time

he got back into the servants' sitting room, a great sheet of flame was roaring out through the kitchen door and little flames were flickering up and down the carpet and table cloth.

Dog grabbed Rosa, pulling her forward, and tried to lift her over his shoulder. But she was too heavy for Dog. He hadn't a hope of being able to carry her. So he did the next best thing. He slid her to the floor, grabbed her ankles, and, blinded and coughing from the smoke that now filled the place, he dragged her across the room on her back, out into the corridor, and along to the hall.

Dog stopped beside a small table with a telephone and hurriedly put through a call to the Fire Brigade. Then, with the fire roaring away in the kitchen and the servants' sitting room, he decided that it would not be safe to leave Rosa in the hall. He tried the front door but this was locked and no key was visible. But next to the door he found a pair of French windows leading to a side garden.

He put his shoulders to these and burst them open. Then he went back, took his velvet bag from the crate, grabbed Rosa by the ankles, and dragged her into the garden. She would be quite safe there.

His duty done, all his

chivalrous instincts satisfied, Dog now began to think of himself. He didn't want to be around when the fire engine arrived; and he didn't want to set off through the night streets of London carrying a bag of swag. Any policeman just seeing Dog out so late would stop him on general principles. So Dog thrust the bag deep into the heart of a little yew tree for subsequent collection and then took to his heels. Turning the corner of the street at a gallop, the inevitable happened—he ran into a policeman. The officer's hand shot out and grabbed Dog.

"Hullo, Dog—where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"Home," said Dog—without hope.

"Not tonight," said the policeman, confirming Dog's pessimism.

And Dog was taken to the station and booked for loitering with intent to commit a felony. His protest to the station sergeant that the last thing he was doing was loitering went unheeded.

Dog spent the night in a cell and was left kicking his heels and threatening the Habeas Corpus Act until eleven o'clock the next morning. Then he was hauled up in front of a Detective-Inspector, an old friend of his.

"Okay, Dog," said the

Inspector, "you'd better come clean. The crate trick is finished and we want to know who is running it. Not you, because you haven't the brains."

"What crate trick?" asked Dog.

The Inspector sighed. "Last night it was worked on the house of a Mr. Whitlow. A collection of valuable snuff-boxes is missing. Unfortunately for you a fire broke out while you were there, so you couldn't risk sitting in your crate and waiting for the usual morning collection. You broke out through the French windows—out, Dog, because the glass on the terrace and the way the catch was smashed prove it. Talk."

"I wasn't going to," said Dog innocently, "because I don't like being immodest—but I didn't do no such thing. I was walking down the street when I saw the glare of fire through the house windows. I went into the garden, found the French windows burst open—so I hopped in and telephoned for the Fire Brigade. Any responsible citizen would have done the same. Then I thought there might be someone about in danger, so—"

"So you rescued the cook, eh?"

"That's right. If anyone was pulling a crate job they must

have done it before I arrived."

"Indeed? According to the police doctor this cook was given a knockout pill. The kind used for dogs. She must have caught you on the job. You gave her the old malarkey—she's a simple soul—and then you took a glass of beer with her and slipped her the Mickey Finn."

"To a woman? I would never do such a thing!"

"We'll see—they have just brought her down for questioning. She'll recognize you."

Dog's heart sank. A few moments later Rosa Caramaggio was brought into the room, and Dog resigned himself to the inevitable.

The Inspector said to Rosa, "Have you ever seen this man before?"

Rosa looked at Dog and then shook her head. "Thissa man? No—I never see him."

"Not in Mr. Whitlow's house last night?"

"No. Never see thissa man before. Issa nice man?"

"Not very," said the Inspector sharply. "But—listen. This is the man who saved your life last night when the fire broke out. But I want to know what happened *before* the fire—when you caught him in the house—"

"Is thissa the man who save me!" Rosa cried. "Is a splendido man! Rosa always

grateful!" She came forward and embraced Dog fervently, and Dog, delighted, but not knowing why she was helping him, said over his shoulder to the Inspector, "She was sleeping heavily when I rescued her. Probably uses sleeping pills."

"Break it up," said the Inspector.

And that was it.

Try as he might, the Inspector simply could not shake Rosa. She had never seen Dog before, but her heart was overflowing with gratitude to him.

In the end the Inspector had to let Dog go, and off he went, taking Rosa with him.

They walked down the road together to a small café and Dog ordered coffee and Chelsea buns; and while they waited for them, he gave Rosa a wink.

"You're a good un," he said. "Never seen me before. You should have seen the Inspector's face."

"But issa true," said Rosa.

Dog looked at her in amazement. "But we had beer together in the sitting room. You came down the stairs with the dog—don't you remember?"

"No, I not remember."

"But," insisted Dog, "you came down with the dog. We

had some beer and chat—"

"Oh!" Rosa put her hands to her mouth. "I dida that?"

"You certainly dida."

For a moment Rosa hesitated. Then leaning forward she said, "You keepa secret?"

"Anything for you, Rosa."

And then she explained that she was a confirmed sleep-walker, particularly when she had some worry on her mind, and that night she had gone to sleep worrying. In her sleep the answer to her worry had come. She had left some underclothes to dry in front of an electric fire in the kitchen. So she had sleep-walked downstairs to remove them for fear of fire and...

"When I walka like that, *caro mio*, I talka, drinka, do everything like awaka—but afterwards I remember nothings. Speaka me—you married man?"

"No," said Dog, gazing with reverence at this splendid creature who did not avert her eyes at the sight of his face. "Bachelor."

But it was a state that did not last for long. They were married and eventually they had a son called Angelo—which is another story and one you may or may not have heard.



# Ben Hecht

## The Miracle of the Fifteen Murderers

*The fifteen murderers of The X Club were the medical peerage of our time. Their meetings were always held in absolute secrecy, behind locked doors, because they revealed the most perfect of "perfect crimes"; but in these revelations lay the hope for a better world . . . one of Ben Hecht's most brilliant stories . . .*

There is always an aura of mystery to the conclaves of medical men. One may wonder whether the secrecy with which the fraternity surrounds its gathering is designed to keep the layman from discovering how much it knows or how much it doesn't know. Either knowledge would be unnerving to that immemorial guinea pig who submits himself to the abracadabras of chemicals, scalpels; and incantations under the delusion he is being cured rather than explored.

Among the most mysterious of medical get-togethers in this generation have been those held in New York City by a group of eminent doctors calling themselves The X Club. Every three months this little band of healers have hied them to the Walton Hotel overlooking the

East River and, behind locked doors and beyond the eye of even medical journalism, engaged themselves in unknown emprise lasting till dawn.

What the devil had been going on in these conclaves for twenty years no one knew, not even the ubiquitous head of the American Medical Association, nor yet any of the colleagues, wives, friends, or dependents of The X Club's members. The talent for secrecy is highly developed among doctors who, even with nothing to conceal, are often as close mouthed as old-fashioned bomb throwers on their way to a rendezvous.

How then do I know the story of these long-guarded sessions? The answer is—the war. The war has put an end to them, as it has to nearly all mysteries other than its own.

The world, engaged in re-examining its manners and its soul, has closed the door on minor adventure. Nine of the fifteen medical sages who comprised The X Club are in uniform and preside over combat zone hospitals. Deficiencies of age and health have kept the others at home—with increased labors.

"Considering that we have disbanded," Dr. Alex Hume said to me at dinner one evening, "and that it is unlikely we shall ever assemble again, I see no reason for preserving our secret. Yours is a childish and romantic mind and may be revolted by the story I tell you. You will undoubtedly translate the whole thing into some sort of diabolical tale and miss the deep human and scientific import of The X Club. But I am not the one to reform the art of fiction, which must substitute sentimentality for truth and Cinderella for Galileo."

And so on. I will skip the rest of my friend's all-knowing prelude. You may have read Dr. Hume's various books, dealing with horseplay of the subconscious. If you have, you know this bald-headed master mind well enough. If not, take my word for it he is a genius.

There is nobody I know more adept at prancing around in the solar plexus swamps out

of which most of the world's incompetence and confusion appear to rise. He has, too, if there is any doubt about his great talent, the sneer and chuckle which are the war whoop of the super-psychologist. His face is round and his mouth is pursed in a chronic grimace of disbelief and contradiction. You can't help such an expression once you have discovered what a scurvy and detestable morass is the soul of man. Like most subterranean workers, my friend is almost as blind as a bat behind his heavy glasses. And like many leading psychiatrists, he favors the short and balloon-like physique of Napoleon.

The last dramatic meeting of The X Club was held on a rainy March night. Despite the hostile weather, all fifteen of its members attended, for there was an added lure to this gathering. A new member was to be inducted into the society.

Dr. Hume was assigned to prepare the neophyte for his debut. And it was in the wake of the round-faced soul-fixèr that Dr. Samuel Warner entered the sanctum of The X Club.

Dr. Warner was unusually young for a medical genius—that is, a recognized one. And he had never received a fuller recognition of his wizardry with saw, axe, and punch hole than

his election as a member of The X Club. For the fourteen older men who had invited him to be one of them were leaders in their various fields. They were the medical peerage.

This does not mean necessarily that any layman had ever heard of them. Eminence in the medical profession is as showy at best as a sprig of edelweiss on a mountain top. The war, which offers its magic billboards for the vanities of small souls and transmutes the hunger for publicity into sacrificial and patriotic ardors, has not yet disturbed the anonymity of the great medicos. They have moved their bushels to the front lines and are busy under them spreading their learning among the wounded.

The new member was a tense and good-looking man with the fever of hard work glowing in his steady dark eyes. His wide mouth smiled quickly and abstractedly, as is often the case with surgeons who train their reactions not to interfere with their concentration.

Having exchanged greetings with the eminent club members, who included half of his living medical heroes, Dr. Warner seated himself in a corner and quietly refused a highball, a cocktail, and a slug of brandy. His face remained tense, his athletic body straight

in its chair as if it were poised for a sprint rather than a meeting.

At nine o'clock Dr. William Tick ordered an end to all the guzzling and declared the fifty-third meeting of The X Club in session. The venerable diagnostician placed himself behind a table at the end of the ornate hotel room and glared at the group ranged in front of him.

Dr. Tick had divided his seventy-five years equally between practicing the art of medicine and doing his best to stamp it out—such, at least, was the impression of the thousands of students who had been submitted to his irascible guidance. As Professor of Internal Medicine at a great Eastern medical school, Dr. Tick had favored the education-by-insult theory of pedagogy. There were eminent doctors who still winced when they recalled some of old bilious-eyed, arthritic, stooped Tick's appraisals of their budding talents, and who still shuddered at the memory of his medical philosophy.

"Medicine," Dr. Tick had confided to flock after flock of students, "is a noble dream and at the same time the most ancient expression of error and idiocy known to man. Solving the mysteries of heaven has not

given birth to as many abortive findings as has the quest into the mysteries of the human body. When you think of yourselves as scientists, I want you always to remember that everything you learn from me will probably be regarded tomorrow as the naive confusions of a pack of medical aborigines. Despite all our toil and progress the art of medicine still falls somewhere between trout casting and spook writing.

"There are two handicaps to the practice of medicine," Tick had repeated tenaciously through forty years of teaching: "The first is the eternal charlatanism of the patient who is full of fake diseases and phantom agonies. The second is the basic incompetence of the human mind, medical or otherwise, to observe without prejudice, acquire information without becoming too smug to use it intelligently, and most of all, to apply its wisdom without vanity."

From behind his table Old Tick's eyes glared at the present group of "incompetents" until a full classroom silence had arrived, and then turned to the tense, good-looking face of Dr. Warner.

"We have a new medical genius with us tonight," he began, "one I well remember in

his pre-wizard days. A hyperthyroid with kidney dysfunction indicated. But not without a trace of talent. For your benefit, Sam, I will state the meaning and purpose of our organization."

"I have already done that," said Dr. Hume, "rather thoroughly."

"Dr. Hume's explanations to you," Tick continued coldly, "if they are of a kind with his printed works, have most certainly left you dazed if not dazzled."

"I understood him quite well," Warner said.

"Nonsense," Old Tick said. "You always had a soft spot for psychiatry and I always warned you against it. Psychiatry is a plot against medicine."

Dr. Hume smiled archly at this.

"You will allow me," Tick went on, "to clarify whatever the learned Hume has been trying to tell you."

"Well, if you want to waste time." The new member smiled nervously and mopped his neck with a handkerchief.

Dr. Frank Rosson, the portly and distinguished gynecologist, chuckled. "Tick's going good tonight," he whispered to Hume.

"Senility inflamed by sadism," said Hume.

"Dr. Warner," the pedagogue

continued, "the members of The X Club have a single and interesting purpose in their meeting. They come together every three months to confess to some murder any of them may have committed since our last assembly.

"I am referring, of course, to medical murder. Although it would be a relief to hear any one of us confess to a murder performed out of passion rather than stupidity. Indeed, Dr. Warner, if you have killed a wife or polished off an uncle recently and would care to unbosom yourself, we will listen respectfully. It is understood that nothing you say will be brought to the police or the A.M.A."

Old Tick's eyes paused to study the growing tension in the new member's face.

"I am sure you have not slain any of your relatives," he sighed, "or that you will ever do so except in the line of duty. The learned Hume," he went on, "has undoubtedly explained these forums to you on the psychiatric basis that confession is good for the soul. This is nonsense. We are not here to ease our souls but to improve them. Our real purpose is scientific. Since we dare not admit our mistakes to the public and since we are too great and learned to be

criticized by the untutored laity and since such inhuman perfection as that to which we pretend is not good for our weak and human natures, we have formed this society. It is the only medical organization in the world where the members boast only of their mistakes.

"And now"—Tick beamed on the neophyte—"allow me to define what we consider a real, fine professional murder. It is the killing of a human being who has trustingly placed himself in a doctor's hands. Mind you, the death of a patient does not in itself spell murder. We are concerned only with those cases in which the doctor by a wrong diagnosis or by demonstrably wrong medication or operative procedure has killed off a patient who, without the aforesaid doctor's attention, would have continued to live and prosper."

"Hume explained all this to me," the new member muttered impatiently and then raised his voice. "I appreciate that this is my first meeting and that I might learn more from my distinguished colleagues by listening than by talking. But I have something rather important to say."

"A murder?" Tick asked.

"Yes," said the new member.

"Very good," he said. "We shall be glad to listen to you. But we have several murderers in the docket ahead of you."

The new member was silent and remained sitting bolt-upright in his chair. It was at this point that several, including Hume, noticed there was something more than stage-fright in the young surgeon's tension. The certainty filled the room that Sam Warner had come to his first meeting of The X Club with something violent and mysterious boiling in him.

Dr. Philip Kurtiff, the eminent neurologist, put his hand on Warner's arm and said quietly, "There's no reason to feel badly about anything you're going to tell us. We're all pretty good medical men and we've all done worse—whatever it is."

"If you please," Old Tick demanded, "we will have silence. This is not a sanatorium for doctors with guilt complexes. It is a clinic for error. And we will continue to conduct it in an orderly, scientific fashion. If you want to hold Sam Warner's hand, Kurtiff, that's your privilege. But do it in silence."

He beamed suddenly at the new member.

"I confess," he went on, "that I'm as curious as anybody to hear how so great a

know-it-all as our young friend Dr. Warner could have killed off one of his customers. But our curiosity will have to wait. Since five of you were absent from our last gathering, I think that the confessions of Dr. James Sweeney should be repeated for your benefit."

Dr. Sweeney stood up and turned his lugubrious face and shining eyes to the five absentees.

"Well," he said in his preoccupied monotone, "I told it once, but I'll tell it again. I sent a patient to my X-ray room to have a fluoroscopy done. My assistant gave him a barium meal to drink and put him under the fluoroscope. I walked in a minute later and when I saw the patient under the ray I observed to my assistant, Dr. Kroch, that it was amazing and that I had never seen anything like it. Kroch was too overcome to bear me out. What I saw was that the patient's entire gastro-intestinal tract from the esophagus down was apparently made out of stone. And as I studied this phenomenon I noticed it was becoming clearer and sharper. The most disturbing factor in the situation was that we both knew there was nothing to be done. Dr. Kroch, in fact, showed definite signs of hysteria. Even while we were

studying him the patient showed symptoms of death. Shortly afterward he became moribund and fell to the floor."

"Well, I'll be damned," several of the absentees cried in unison, Dr. Kurtiff adding, "What the hell was it?"

"It was simple," said Sweeney. "The bottom of the glass out of which the patient had drunk his barium meal was caked solid. We had filled him up with plaster of Paris. I fancy the pressure caused an instantaneous coronary attack."

"Good Lord!" the new member said. "How did it get into the glass?"

"What, if anything, was the matter with the patient before he adventured into your office?" Dr. Kurtiff inquired.

"The autopsy revealed chiefly a solidified gastro-intestinal tract," said Sweeney. "But I think from several indications that there may have been a tendency to pyloric spasm which caused the belching for which he was referred to me."

"A rather literary murder," said Old Tick. "A sort of Pygmalion in reverse."

The old professor paused and fastened his red-rimmed eyes on Warner.

"By the way, before we proceed," he said, "I think it is time to tell you the full name of our club. Our full name is

The X-Marks-the-Spot Club. We prefer, of course, to use the abbreviated title as being a bit more social-sounding."

"Of course," said the new member, whose face now appeared to be getting redder.

"And now," announced Old Tick, consulting a scribbled piece of paper, "our first case on tonight's docket will be Dr. Wendell Davis."

There was silence as the elegant stomach specialist stood up. Davis was a doctor who took his manner as seriously as his medicine. Tall, solidly built, gray-haired and beautifully barbered, his face was without expression—a large, pink mask that no patient, however ill and agonized, had ever seen disturbed.

"I was called late last summer to the home of a workingman," he began. "Senator Bell had given a picnic for some of his poorer constituency. As a result of this event, the three children of a steamfitter named Horowitz were brought down with food poisoning. They had overeaten at the picnic. The Senator, as host, felt responsible, and I went to the Horowitz home at his earnest solicitation. I found two of the children very sick and vomiting considerably. They were nine and eleven. The mother gave me a list of the

various foods all three of them had eaten. It was staggering. I gave them a good dose of castor oil.

"The third child, aged seven, was not as ill as the other two. He looked pale, had a slight fever, felt some nausea—but was not vomiting. It seemed obvious that he too was poisoned, but to a lesser degree. Accordingly I prescribed an equal dose of castor oil for the youngest child—just to be on the safe side.

"I was called by the father in the middle of the night. He was alarmed over the condition of the seven-year-old. He reported that the other two children were much improved. I told him not to worry, that the youngest had been a little late in developing food poisoning but would unquestionably be better in the morning, and that his cure was as certain as his sister's and brother's. When I hung up I felt quite pleased with myself for having anticipated the youngest one's condition and prescribed the castor oil prophylactically. I arrived at the Horowitz home at noon the next day and found the two older children practically recovered. The seven-year-old, however, appeared to be very sick indeed. They had been trying to reach me since breakfast. The child had 105°

temperature. It was dehydrated, the eyes sunken and circled, the expression pinched, the nostrils dilated, the lips cyanotic, and the skin cold and clammy."

Dr. Davis paused. Dr. Milton Morris, the renowned lung specialist, spoke.

"It died within a few hours?" he asked.

Dr. Davis nodded.

"Well," Dr. Morris said quietly, "it seems pretty obvious. The child was suffering from acute appendicitis when you first saw it. The castor oil ruptured its appendix. By the time you got around to looking at it again, peritonitis had set in."

"Yes," said Dr. Davis slowly, "that's exactly what happened."

"Murder by castor oil," Old Tick cackled. "I have a memo from Dr. Kenneth Wood. Dr. Wood has the floor."

The noted Scotch surgeon, famed in his college days as an Olympic Games athlete, stood up. He was still a man of prowess, large-handed, heavy-shouldered, and with the purr of masculine strength in his soft voice.

"I don't know what kind of a murder you can call this," Dr. Wood smiled at his colleagues.

"Murder by butchery is the usual title," Tick said.

"No, I doubt that," Dr.

Morris protested, "Ken's too skillful to cut off anybody's leg by mistake."

"I guess you'll have to call it just plain murder by stupidity," Dr. Wood said softly.

Old Tick cackled.

"If you'd paid a little more attention to diagnosis than to shot putting you wouldn't be killing off such hordes of patients," he said.

"This is my first report in three years," Wood answered modestly. "And I've been operating at the rate of four or five daily, including holidays."

"My dear Kenneth," Dr. Hume said, "every surgeon is entitled to one murder in three years. A phenomenal record, in fact—when you consider the temptations."

"Proceed with the crime."

"Well"—the strong-looking surgeon turned to his hospital colleague, the new member—"you know how it is with these acute gall bladders, Sam."

Warner nodded abstractedly.

Dr. Wood went on. "Brought in late at night. In extreme pain. I examined her. Found the pain in the right upper quadrant of the abdomen. It radiated to the back and right shoulder. Completely characteristic of gall bladder. I gave her opiates. They had no effect on her, which, as you know, backs up any gall bladder diagnosis.

Opiates, never touch the gall bladder."

"We know that," said the new member nervously.

"Excuse me," Dr. Wood smiled. "I want to get all the points down carefully. Well, I gave her some nitroglycerine to lessen the pain then. Her temperature was 101. By morning the pain was so severe that it seemed certain the gall bladder had perforated. I operated. There was nothing wrong with her damn gall bladder. She died an hour later."

"What did the autopsy show?" Dr. Sweeney asked.

"Wait a minute," Wood answered. "You're supposed to figure it out, aren't you? Come on—you tell me what was the matter with her."

"Did you take her history?" Dr. Kurtiff asked after a pause.

"No," Wood answered.

"Aha!" Tick snorted. "There you have it! Blind man's buff again."

"It was an emergency." Wood looked flushed. "And it seemed an obvious case. I've had hundreds of them."

"The facts seem to be as follows," Tick spoke up. "Dr. Wood murdered a woman because he misunderstood the source of a pain. We have, then, a very simple problem. What besides the gall bladder can

produce the sort of pain the eminent surgeon has described?"

"Heart," Dr. Morris answered quickly.

"You're getting warm," said Wood.

"Before operating on anyone with so acute a pain and in the absence of any medical history," Tick went on, "I would most certainly have looked at the heart."

"Well, you'd have done right," said Wood quietly. "The autopsy showed an infarction of the descending branch of the right coronary artery."

"Murder by a sophomore," Old Tick pronounced wrathfully.

"The first and last," said Wood quietly. "There won't be any more heart-case mistakes in my hospital."

"Good, good," Old Tick said. "And now, gentlemen, the crimes reported thus far have been too infantile for discussion. We have learned nothing from them other than that science and stupidity go hand in hand, a fact already too well known to us. However, we have with us tonight a young but extremely talented wielder of the medical saws. And I can, from long acquaintance with this same gentleman, assure you that if he has done a murder it is bound to be what some of

my female students would call 'a honey.' He has been sitting here for the last hour, fidgeting like a true criminal, sweating with guilt and a desire to tell all. Gentlemen, I give you our new and youngest culprit, Dr. Samuel Warner."

Dr. Warner faced his fourteen eminent colleagues with a sudden excitement in his manner. The older men regarded him quietly and with various degrees of irritation. They knew without further corroboration than his manner that this medico was full of untenable theories and half-baked medical discoveries. They had been full of such things themselves once. And they settled back to enjoy themselves.

There is nothing as pleasing to a graying medicine man as the opportunity of slapping a dunce cap on the young of science. Old Tick, surveying his colleagues, grinned. They had all acquired the look of pedagogues holding a switch behind their backs.

Dr. Warner mopped his neck with his wet handkerchief and smiled knowingly at the medical peerage. What he knew was that this same critical and suspicious attention would have been offered him were he there to recite the tale of some miraculous cure rather than a murder.

"I'll give you this case in some detail," he said, "because I think it contains as interesting a problem as you can find in practice."

Dr. Rosson, the gynecologist, grunted, but said nothing.

"The patient was a young man, or rather a boy," Warner went on eagerly. "He was seventeen and amazingly talented. In fact, about the most remarkable young man I've ever met. He wrote poetry. That's how I happened to meet him. I read one of his poems in a magazine and, by God, it was so impressive I wrote him a letter."

Dr. Kurtiff frowned at this unmedical behavior.

"Rhymed poetry?" Dr. Wood asked, with a wink at Old Tick.

"Yes," said Warner. "I read all his manuscripts. They were sort of revolutionary. His poetry was a cry against injustice. Every kind of injustice. Bitter and burning."

"Wait a minute," Dr. Rosson said. "The new member seems to have some misconception of our function. We are not a literary society, Warner."

"I know that," said Warner, working his jaw muscles and smiling lifelessly.

"And before you get started," Dr. Hume grinned, "no bragging. You can do your

bragging at the annual Surgeons' Convention."

"Gentlemen," Warner said, "I have no intention of bragging. I'll stick to murder, I assure you. And as bad a one as you've ever heard."

"Good," Dr. Kurtiff said. "Go on. And take it easy and don't break down."

"I won't break down," Warner said. "Don't worry. Well, the patient was sick for two weeks before I was called."

"I thought you were his friend," Dr. Davis said.

"I was," Warner answered. "But he didn't believe in doctors."

"No faith in them, eh?" Old Tick cackled. "Brilliant boy."

"He was," said Warner eagerly. "I felt upset when I came and saw how sick he was. I had him moved to a hospital at once."

"Oh, a rich poet," Dr. Sweeney said.

"No," said Warner. "I paid his expenses. And I spent all the time I could with him. The sickness had started with a severe pain on the left side of the abdomen. He was going to call me but the pain subsided after three days, so the patient thought he was well. But it came back after two days and he began running a temperature. He developed diarrhea. There was pus and blood, but

no amoeba or pathogenic bacteria when he finally sent for me. After the pathology reports I made a diagnosis of ulcerative colitis. The pain being on the left side ruled out the appendix. I put the patient on sulfaguanidin and unconcentrated liver extract and gave him a high protein diet—chiefly milk. Despite this treatment and constant observation the patient got worse. He developed generalized abdominal tenderness, both direct and rebound, and rigidity of the entire left rectus muscle. After two weeks of careful treatment the patient died."

"And the autopsy showed you'd been wrong?" Dr. Wood asked.

"I didn't make an autopsy," said Warner. "The boy's parents had perfect faith in me. As did the boy. They both believed I was doing everything possible to save his life."

"Then how do you know you were wrong in your diagnosis?" Dr. Hume asked.

"By the simple fact," said Warner irritably, "that the patient died instead of being cured. When he died I knew I had killed him by faulty diagnosis."

"A logical conclusion," said Dr. Sweeney. "Pointless medication is no alibi."

"Well, gentlemen," Old Tick

cackled from his table, "our talented new member has obviously polished off a great poet and close personal friend. Indictments of his diagnosis are now in order."

But no one spoke. Doctors have a sense for things unseen and complications unstated. And nearly all the fourteen looking at Warner felt there was something hidden. The surgeon's tension, his elation and its overtone of mockery, convinced them there was something untold in the story of the dead poet. They approached the problem cautiously.

"How long ago did the patient die?" Dr. Rosson asked.

"Last Wednesday," said Warner. "Why?"

"What hospital?" asked Davis.

"Saint Michael's."

"You say the parents had faith in you," said Kurtiff, "and still have. Yet you seem curiously worried about something. Has there been any inquiry by the police?"

"No," said Warner, "I committed the perfect crime. The police haven't even heard of it. And even my victim died full of gratitude." He beamed at the room. "Listen," he went on, "even you people may not be able to disprove my diagnosis."

This brash challenge irritated a number of the members.

"I don't think it will be very difficult to knock out your diagnosis," said Dr. Morris.

"There's a catch to it," said Wood slowly, his eyes boring at Warner.

"The only catch there is," said Warner quickly, "is the complexity of the case. You gentlemen evidently prefer the simpler malpractice type of crime, such as I've listened to tonight."

There was a pause, then Dr. Davis inquired in a soothing voice, "You described an acute onset of pain before the diarrhea, didn't you?"

"That's right," said Warner.

"Well," Davis continued coolly, "the temporary relief of symptoms and their recurrence within a few days sounds superficially like ulcers—except for one point."

"I disagree," Dr. Sweeney said softly. "Dr. Warner's diagnosis is a piece of blundering stupidity. The symptoms he has presented have nothing to do with ulcerative colitis."

Warner flushed and his jaw muscles moved angrily.

"Would you mind backing up your insults with a bit of science?" he said.

"Very easily done," Sweeney answered calmly. "The late onset of diarrhea and fever you

describe rules out ulcerative colitis in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. What do you think, Dr. Tick?"

"No ulcers," said Tick, his eyes studying Warner.

"You mentioned a general tenderness of the abdomen as one of the last symptoms," said Dr. Davis smoothly.

"That's right," said Warner.

"Well, if you have described the case accurately," Davis continued, "there is one obvious fact revealed. The general tenderness points to a peritonitis."

"How about a twisted gut?" Dr. Wood asked. "That could produce the symptoms described."

"No," said Dr. Rosson. "A vulvulus means gangrene and death in three days. Warner says he attended him for two weeks and that the patient was sick for two weeks before he was called. The length of the illness rules out intussusception, vulvulus, and intestinal tumor."

"There's one other thing," Dr. Morris said. "A left-sided appendix."

"That's out, too," Dr. Wood said quickly. "The first symptom of a left-sided appendix would not be the acute pain described by Warner."

"The only thing we have determined," said Dr. Sweeney, "is a perforation other than

ulcer. Why not go on with that?"

"Yes," said Dr. Morris. "Ulcerative colitis is out of the question, considering the course taken by the disease. I'm sure we're dealing with another type of perforation."

"The next question," announced Old Tick, "is, what made the perforation?"

Dr. Warner mopped his face with his wet handkerchief and said softly, "I never thought of an object perforation."

"You should have," Dr. Kurtiff smiled.

"Come, come," Old Tick interrupted. "Let's not wander. What caused the perforation?"

"He was seventeen," Kurtiff answered, "and too old to be swallowing pins."

"Unless," said Dr. Humie, "he had a taste for pins. Did the patient want to live, Warner?"

"He wanted to live," said Warner grimly, "more than anybody I ever knew."

"I think we can ignore the suicide theory," said Dr. Kurtiff. "I am certain we are dealing with a perforation of the intestines and not of the subconscious."

"There you are, Warner," Old Tick said. "We've narrowed it down. The spreading tenderness you described means a spreading infection. The course taken by the disease means a

perforation other than ulcerous. And a perforation of that type means an object swallowed. We have ruled out pins and chicken bones. Which leaves us with only one other normal guess."

"A fish bone," said Dr. Sweeney.

"Exactly," said Tick.

Warner stood listening tensely to the voices affirming the diagnosis. Tick delivered the verdict.

"I think we are all agreed," he said, "that Sam Warner killed his patient by treating him for ulcerative colitis when an operation removing an abscessed fish bone would have saved his life."

Warner moved quickly across the room to the closet where he had hung his hat and coat.

"Where you going?" Dr. Wood called after him. "We've just started the meeting."

Warner was putting on his coat and grinning.

"I haven't got much time," he said, "but I want to thank all of you for your diagnoses. You were right about there being a catch to the case. The catch is that my patient is *still alive!* I've been treating him for ulcerative colitis for two weeks and I realized this afternoon that I had wrongly diagnosed the case—and that he would be dead in twenty-four hours unless I could find out what

really was the matter with him."

Warner was in the doorway, his eyes glittering.

"Thanks again, gentlemen, for the consultation and your diagnosis," he said. "It will enable me to save my patient's life."

A half hour later the members of The X Club stood grouped in one of the operating rooms of St. Michael's Hospital. They were different-looking men from those who had been playing a medical Halloween in the Walton Hotel. There is a change that comes over doctors when they face disease. The oldest and the weariest of them draw vigor from a crisis. The shamble leaves them and it is the straight back of the champion that enters the operating room. Confronting the problem of life and death, the tired, red-rimmed eyes become full of greatness and even beauty.

On the operating table lay the naked body of a Negro boy. Dr. Warner in his surgical whites stood over him, waiting. The anesthetist finally nodded. The dark skin had turned ashen and the fevered young Negro lay unconscious.

The fourteen members of The X Club watched Warner operate. Wood nodded ap-

rovably at his speed. Rosson cleared his throat to say something, but the swift-moving hands of the surgeon held him silent. No one spoke. The minutes passed. The nurses quietly handed instruments to the surgeon. Blood spattered their hands.

Fourteen great medical men stared hopefully at the pinched and unconscious face of a colored boy who had swallowed a fish bone. No king or pope ever lay in travail with more medical genius holding its breath around him.

Suddenly the perspiring surgeon raised something aloft in his gloved fingers.

"Wash this off," he muttered to the nurse, "and show it to the gentlemen."

He busied himself placing drains in the abscessed cavity and then powdered some sulfanilamide into the opened abdomen to kill the infection.

Old Tick stepped forward and took the object from the nurse's hand.

"A fish bone," he said.

The X Club gathered around it as if it were a treasure indescribable.

"The removal of this small object," Tick cackled softly, "will enable the patient to continue writing poetry denouncing the greeds and horrors of our world."

That, in effect, was the story Hume told me, plus the epilogue of the Negro poet's recovery three weeks later. We had long finished dinner and it was late night when we stepped into the war-dimmed streets of New York. The headlines on the newsstands had changed in size only. They were larger in honor of larger slaughters.

Looking at them you could see the death-strewn wastes of battles. But another picture came to my mind—a picture that had in it the hope of a better world. It was the hospital room in which fifteen famed and learned heroes stood battling for the life of a Negro boy who had swallowed a fish bone.



# Cornell Woolrich

## Murder After Death

*Cornell Woolrich's most successful stories generally fall into two categories. First, there are the tales which have, to quote Anthony Boucher, "the enormous impact of everyday-gone-wrong"—the kindling of that anonymous and implacable horror which lurks in and around the commonplaces of everyday living. Second, there are the psychological studies of terror and suspense often ending with a whiplash of surprise, especially when Fate intervenes—Cornell Woolrich was a master of this type of emotional thriller . . . The novelet which follows, written late in Cornell Woolrich's career, combines both types—with emphasis on the shocking . . .*

Delphine Marchand, although her name was the Frenchest of the French, was the most American of Americans. She had never seen France; her scanty store of French had come out of a high school foreign-language course, and even the little there was of it was melting away from lack of use like an ice-cream cone dropped on a sizzling July sidewalk.

But her forebears had been of French origin. They were among the Huguenots (French Protestants) who had been driven out of France by Louis the Fourteenth and who first trekked numbly into Holland, and from there went on to the

New World to found and settle New Rochelle, in what was still Dutch colonial territory. They were the displaced people of the Seventeenth Century.

By the time Delphine was born (the exact date: D-Day, June 6, 1944), her branch of the family had long been established at the extreme opposite end of the hospitable land-mass—in the San Francisco Bay region—and had become if not fabulously wealthy at least fruitfully so. They were wine-growers.

At the age of nineteen, a college junior, Delphine already had a three-part trust fund waiting for her: one-third payable in two years, when she

became twenty-one; one-third payable when she married; and the final third payable when she became thirty. The last two were interchangeable: whichever came earlier got that particular third first.

At the age of nineteen, a college junior, Delphine met Georg Mohler, who was studying to be a pharmacist. The coincidence of the two—Mohler and the Marchand trust fund—was not a healthful event.

Mohler's family, like Delphine's, were escapees, but there the similarity ended. There was a difference of three centuries. His people had fled Austria and the Nazis in the late Thirties. Mohler himself, although he now had his citizenship papers, had been born in the old country, and still spelled his first name in the old-country way, without the final "e."

Georg had every virtue of his sturdy peasant forebears: thrift, tenacity, ruggedness, and single-mindedness in love. He also had their one defect: thick-wittedness. They had been excellent sheepherders for generations in the Alpine foothills—which was not the best possible qualification for success in the dynamic electronic America of the Sixties.

Georg had felt three successive waves of attraction for Delphine, each one stronger

than the preceding one. The first was simply attraction toward a very pretty girl, whom he certainly didn't intend to marry, but whom he intended to try to possess by any means short of marriage. The second was toward her good family background, which would be a great asset to anyone like himself. He became willing to marry her if he had to—to acquire that prestige for himself. And the third was the discovery of the tripartite trust fund which was waiting for Delphine. Now nothing *but* marrying her would satisfy him.

Naturally, Georg didn't want to marry her ahead of the trust fund and have to support her for those two intervening years. He just wanted to stake out his claim, so to speak, and then step in right along with the trust fund. California has a community property law.

At the beginning of her twentieth summer and of her third college vacation, Delphine went east to visit an aunt who lived in New York. Only a non-New Yorker would have selected New York as a place to spend the hot-weather months, but the aunt had air-conditioning and also a place out on Long Island which doubled with her city apartment as a homestead.

Georg saw her off at the

airport—she was all in white except for her eyes and as beautiful as you can be only at nineteen; he kissed her and told her he'd miss her and told her he loved her and told her there'd never be anybody else but her—and a lot of other things often said at airports.

She wrote him with ardent frequency at first, almost at the rate of a letter a day. She was enchanted with New York—it was the first time she had been there—and with the people of her own age whom she met through her aunt.

But as June became July, the letters began to falter. Georg smiled indulgently. He wasn't worried; they had too good an understanding.

Then from twice a week the letters dropped to once a week, then to once in two weeks. The last one casually mentioned a young Mr. Reed Newcomb she had met at a dinner party that her aunt had arranged for her.

Then the letters stopped dead.

Georg became uneasy. His inherent European thrift didn't like the idea of that sizable trust fund—which by now he considered his own—getting away from him. Equally, or almost so, his masculine pride didn't like the idea of anyone getting Delphine away from him.

He called her up long-distance at her aunt's apartment, which was on Lexington Avenue in the Murray Hill district. He hated to have to do it—his ingrained peasant frugality; but this was not a time to count pennies.

She was noncommittal about almost everything—noncommittal about when she was coming back, noncommittal about young Reed Newcomb, and noncommittal about whether she still felt the same toward Georg.

Hanging up, he knew he'd lost her—or would if he didn't do something about it quickly.

So on the first of August he started out on the long four-day, three-night train trip to the Eastern seaboard, bent on protecting what he considered his vested rights in Delphine's trust fund. He went by train because he was afraid of planes, even though flying was a time-saver.

His train arrived at Grand Central early in the morning, about nine, but that didn't deter him. He called Delphine's aunt's apartment right from the station.

The aunt, who knew of him through her sister, told him Delphine was no longer staying with her. She had moved out and taken a small apartment of her own a few weeks before.

The aunt sounded hurt about this, but she obligingly supplied Georg with the address.

Uneasiness had now become alarm. He hadn't arrived on the scene a minute too soon, he thought. Living alone like that, away from her aunt's supervision, meant that the coast was now clear for Reed Newcomb.

Georg went over there immediately, to have a showdown and to extend his option; not even taking time to check into a hotel; he simply deposited his suitcase in a locker. It was still before ten in the morning, but he didn't let that stop him.

She didn't have her name in the bell-slot yet—either she hadn't had time in the rush of moving in or she had overlooked it. But he was able to figure it out easily enough: it was the only blank slot, and none of the other names were hers. So he pushed the button, the door opened by remote control, and he rode up in a coffin-sized self-service elevator. When he recalled this later, it struck him as an omen.

Again he rang, this time upstairs, and the door opened and Delphine stood there. She looked very sleepy and disheveled, and not at all enthusiastic at seeing him. She was wearing a silk wrap-around over a nightgown.

"Georg!" she whispered. At first he thought surprise had robbed her of her voice.

"What are you doing here?" she whispered. "How did you know where I was?"

"Your aunt told me." His voice sounded loud, in contrast to hers.

"You never said a word about coming to New York." Her voice was still a whisper. The expression on her face seemed to indicate that her surprise wasn't exactly a pleasant one.

"You stopped writing, so what else was I to do?" Again his voice sounded unnaturally loud because of the softness of hers.

This time she said, "Sh!"—cautiously.

"Why 'Sh'?" he wanted to know.

For a moment he thought she didn't want any of the neighbors to see her standing in the doorway dressed like that and talking to a strange young man.

"Aren't you going to ask me to come in?" he said finally.

"Georg, I can't under the circumstances—"

"Well, that's great, after I've come three thousand miles!"

"You had no right to come here like this without giving me warning."

His suspicions now fully

activated, he deliberately pushed the door back, pushed past her, and went in.

It was a small one-room apartment, with an even smaller sleeping alcove attached to it.

Almost the first thing Georg saw, once he was inside, was the rumpled bed in the alcove. And in the rumpled bed, wearing pajamas and sound asleep, was a crew-cutted young man—by inference Reed Newcomb.

Georg's face went as white as if he'd seen a ghost.

Delphine tactfully drew a hanging of some sort across the alcove, but it was too late.

"No wonder you didn't want me to come in 'under the circumstances,'" he said bitterly. "No wonder you left your aunt's. No wonder you stopped writing. And how long has this been going on?"

"Look, I won't have a scandal here," Delphine told him firmly. "Either keep your voice down or leave."

"Does your aunt know about this?"

"Nobody does," she told him. "Only you, and if you hadn't come around here prying, even you wouldn't have found out. It's my own business and nobody has any ri—"

"Get him out of here," Georg ordered roughly, "or I'll do it myself."

"You'll do nothing of the

sort," Delphine flamed. "He's my husband. We were married three weeks ago, and he has more right here than you have."

Georg was so stunned he couldn't stand on his feet; he had to fall back into a chair, and he looked so close to collapse that she actually ran and got him a glass of water.

It was all over now. Goodbye to the trust fund and all the plans he'd made for buying a little pharmacy of his own. All finished, washed up.

He sat there dejectedly, his head so low it was almost between his legs.

"Do your parents know?"

"No," she said. "Reed and I decided to keep it to ourselves for a while. I have one more year of college to finish, first. I'm going back in September. And Reed has his law school." Then she added anxiously, "You won't tell them when you go back, will you, Georg? Please don't. Please do this one last favor for me."

"I won't," Georg said dully. But he decided privately that if he found it at all serviceable as a weapon, he certainly would tell them.

There was no use staying after that. She showed quite plainly that she considered him to be in the way. So he got up, they shook hands coolly, and he left.

Thus Delphine's husband and her former fiancé did not meet eye to eye at that particular time, even though one of them glimpsed the other sleeping. The two most important men in her life. But two men is always one man too many, in any life, at any time.

Delphine Marchand, now Delphine Newcomb, never came back to the California that had bred her. She never came back to finish that final year of college which had been the reason for her keeping her marriage a secret . . .

Georg's phone rang one Sunday afternoon. It wasn't even his phone, he lived in a rooming house, so it was the rooming-house phone. But the call was for him and an anonymous voice yelled: "Anybody named Mohler up there?" (He thought afterward, "What a way to be told—love is over, happiness is over.")

He put down the whiskey shotglass that hadn't helped him to stop thinking about her.

A woman was crying at the other end.

He couldn't recognize her by the tears, but then when she spoke brokenly through them, he recognized her by the words: Flora Marchand, Delphine's mother.

"Georg," was all she could

say at first. "Georg. You were so close to her. I had to call you. You were so close to her."

"What is it?" First he thought: they've found out about the marriage. It's broken them up. Maybe I still have a chance. Maybe they'll annul it. She's still under age. Maybe they'll at least contest Newcomb's coming into the trust fund.

Georg's heart put on a smile. "What is it?"

"Georg. It's Delphine. She's gone."

She'd run away from them, was hiding from them. "Disappeared?"

"Not disappeared. Don't you understand me? She's dead. She died early this morning in New York."

The news was like a form of death itself. He seemed to go down into deep water, slowly, like a diver in deep-sea apparatus, sinking to the bottom while the light around him gradually darkened, just as it would in deepening water, from glowing green to indigo-blue to rayless black.

Then, at the very depths, the thought came to him: *He did it. It was his doing.*

But the mother's voice, reaching him meanwhile like a message coming down through a diver's lifeline, was saying, "... natural causes. The young

and healthy are so careless. A terrible thought occurred to us at first. She left a letter written just before she died revealing her marriage to this man. When we heard about it we naturally suspected the worst—but the medical examiner's report was read to us over the phone, and we spoke to the doctor who attended her at the end. Simple neglect. They went swimming at one of the places around there—Jones Beach. She caught a chill. The chill turned into a light cold. The light cold turned into a heavy one. But she was young and newly married, so she couldn't be bothered nursing herself. Suddenly her resistance collapsed, and it was too late to do anything to save her. She died of bronchial pneumonia and complications."

He struggled slowly upward again, back to the surface of life—of a life that was simply vengeance now, not love any more.

*Then I'll say he did it. I'll accuse him of it. I'll do more than accuse. I'll make it stick. I'll fasten it on him so tightly that he'll never be able to free himself of it.*

*I'll make him die for it.*

The room she lay in was a nuclear fission of flowers. Its walls were completely hidden by them. Only its ceiling was

visible and that part of the floor where two lanes had been left clear, for people to come and go. Flowers of every kind were there, flowers of every color. All but one. There were white flowers, pink flowers, yellow flowers, lavender, blue, even bronze. All but red—for red is unbecoming to death.

And in the middle of them all she lay, so quiet, so inscrutable. Like a madonna with downcast, alabaster eyelids in a medieval painting. If she had been beautiful in life, she was transcendent in death. The four tall tapers at the corners of the bier were like topaz prayers for her soul going steadily, tirelessly upward.

Georg came and stood in the doorway, with the attaché case hanging from one hand. A case such as anyone is apt to use nowadays when he travels on a train or on a plane and doesn't want to carry too much with him.

Two small gilt caneback chairs were drawn up side by side facing the catafalque. On them sat two anonymous, black-garbed, heavily veiled figures, much like the dead come to mourn the dead. He could only tell they were alive by the slight puckering which their indrawn breaths made in the thickly meshed veiling. That and the occasional dab that a

black-gloved hand, clenching a black-bordered handkerchief, made toward an unattainable eye or mouth. Unattainable because the veiling screened them off.

He could tell they were women because their black garb fell circularly around them to the floor. And lastly, by a process of elimination, he could tell they were Delphine's mother, Flora Marchand, and Delphine's aunt. The man standing behind them was Delphine's father. Men do not veil their faces to mourn their dead, and Georg had met him on a number of occasions.

These three made up her entire immediate family.

Georg unobtrusively placed the attaché case behind a lavish floral design mounted on an easel and came softly forward to join them.

Mr. Marchand shook hands gravely with him, and then tapped the women on their shoulders to attract their attention. Delphine's mother turned and placed her own hand on top of the one Georg had resting on the back of her chair, and patted it in shared grief and mournful affection. Georg bent down and kissed the back of her hand, as one who had so nearly become her fond son-in-law. The aunt gave a subdued sniffle deep within the

recesses of her black goblin's head.

Georg straightened, stepped back a pace, and then stood motionless alongside the father, his hands clasped in back of him at times, in front of him at other times, folded over his chest at still others, but never at any time in his pockets.

For nearly an hour the little quartet kept its vigil, while nothing seemed to move except an occasional flicker or undulation of the livid flame-tips.

At last Delphine's father bent forward and whispered solicitously to her mother, "You'd better let me take you back to your sister's now, dear. You must get some rest. You have a trying day ahead of you tomorrow."

This was what Georg had been waiting for. He leaned over her opposite shoulder and murmured reassuringly, "I'll remain here in your place, Mrs. Marchand, I'll remain here until the last moment, until they close for the night. She won't be left alone."

The two women rose stiffly, and the man led them painfully toward the door, like two scarecrows in fluttering black rags.

Georg removed one chair, and sat down on the second one, with a groan for finally relaxed limbs. He took out a

cigarette and held it tentatively in his hand, then decided against it and put it away.

He had loved her in his fashion, had respected her in his fashion. What he had come here to do was not against her; it was against the man who had snatched her from him, and then, like a clumsy fool, had not known how to guard, how to cherish, his precious acquisition, but had dropped it, let it fall through his fingers, so that it was smashed, irrevocably destroyed, never to be put together again.

He had to pay for that. He had to be punished. And he was going to be.

Delphine's aunt had had her chauffeur and limousine waiting for her downstairs in front of the funeral chapel; Georg had seen them when he came in. The chauffeur was an attentive man who had been her driver for years; it was almost certain that when he saw her on the point of leaving he would come forward into the building's vestibule or entranceway to assist her out to the car and relieve Delphine's father of his double duty. Thus at a quick glance, if the director should happen to look out of his private office, four people would seem to be leaving—the same number that had been upstairs.

Georg kept consulting his watch at pulse-beat intervals. When it was exactly a quarter to ten, he got up, put his chair back with the other one, and picked up the attaché case from its place of safekeeping. He found a corner where the floral tributes were a veritable thicket. Then it was the easiest thing in the world for Georg to insinuate himself into this from the rear, by flattening himself along the wall, and once within it to squat down on his heels and become completely invisible.

He waited with the terrible patience that only vindictiveness knows, feeling no strain, no fatigue, from his awkward position. He was as patient as a blowgun savage waiting in an Amazonian jungle for his prey to come within range.

The closing hour came at last. There was the sibilance of an ascending tread on the thick-carpeted staircase outside, and then somebody came into the room. Georg couldn't hear him come in, but knew he had, because the ascending *schuh-schuh* had stopped.

The attendant must have stood there in the entrance, looking around, seeing nothing but the two discarded little gilt chairs. Georg couldn't see him, but far more important, he couldn't see Georg.

Georg didn't hear him move into the center of the room—he walked so velvety—but the light changed in a way difficult to describe; there wasn't any less of it, but its texture became different, colder and less personal; and Georg knew the attendant had snuffed out the ritual tapers. A moment later the scent of singed cord drifted past Georg's nostrils and quickly vanished.

Now the attendant went back to the entrance again. Still no hint of footfalls—but a fern or flower spray hissed a little at his passage, then sighed back into place again. The light switch snapped like a child's cap pistol, exaggerated by the unnatural stillness, and the world and everyone in it, living and dead, turned a deep sapphire-blue—the blue of midnight and of caves and of ocean depths.

The purring tread went down the stairs, to where it had come from. Another light switch clicked, this time far more faintly than the first. The stairs and upper hall went dark, but Georg only guessed it—he couldn't have told the difference where he was.

Someone's voice said to someone else, "Everybody's out."

He could hear windows being fastened. An air-con-

ditioner whirred to a stop. A desk drawer cracked closed. A man's voice entered into a brief conversation—evidently over a phone; most likely the man was calling his home to say that he was leaving now.

Meanwhile, somewhere to the back, a door opened, the sound rising sharply. Then the door closed, and the sound died.

"Ready?" a voice said.

"All set," another voice answered.

A final light switch clicked. The front door opened. The front door closed. Then the front door was locked from the outside.

A car engine came to life out in the street in front of the funeral parlor. It quickened, pulled away, and was lost in the distance.

Georg was alone with the dead.

The halo or disk cast by his pocket flashlight was like a low-lying blue-white moon peering weirdly through a matted jungle. A cannibal-moon, a headhunters' moon, a moon of the pygmies, its rays falling on gardenias and orchids—and boa-constrictors and piranha.

He perched it on a corner of the casket so that the moon shone full into her face. She slept on undisturbed; her

eyelids never flickering in its dazzle.

Overcome for a moment by the memory of love, and by the too-realistic image of the one he had once loved, Georg leaned over and kissed her.

Then he drew back sharply, almost in a recoil.

It was like kissing cold, hardened wax.

He took the hypodermic needle out of the attaché case and held it for a moment against the light to make doubly sure that it was ready—though it was, it had to be, for he had readied it himself.

Then he turned back the white satin quilt that covered her shoulders. It was gross-stitched in silver, in a diamond-shaped pattern.

He inserted one hand into the casket. With this hand he steadied the point of the hypodermic.

The other hand, on the outside, moved forward to press the plunger . . .

Georg traced Reed to a room in a midtown hotel where Newcomb had gone simply to ride out his grief—or else go down under it—after finding it impossible to remain in the tiny apartment that had been his, and Delphine's.

The first time Georg asked

for him at the desk, Reed was out. This was around eight the next evening.

"You don't know when he'll be back?" Georg asked.

"No, I don't," the desk man answered.

Georg decided to wait right there for him, rather than go away and have to come back later. He went over and sat down in one of the lounge chairs.

His only glimpse of Reed had been of a close-cropped head sleeping in Delphine's bed, and this type of shorn hair was anything but rare among contemporary young men; but something told Georg that he'd know him when he came in, and he did.

The shoulders were slumped dejectedly; the walk was desultory and listless. Misery had put out the shine in his eyes, and he had a cylindrical package under one arm that was obviously a bottle.

The clerk confirmed the recognition by pointing to Georg, and Reed turned around, looked, then came over toward him questioningly.

Georg donned the forthright, unpretentious attitude that he could assume whenever it suited his pose. He rose and extended his hand. "My name's Mohler. I used to be a friend of Delphine's. We were school-

mates. I looked you up because—well, each of us was close to her in our own way."

Reed stood looking at him intently for a long moment without saying anything. Georg tried to translate the look. Suspicion? Doubt? Resentment? No, none of those. Then he got it. The man was dazed with his grief, stunned with suffering.

I'll put you out of your pain, Georg vowed to himself.

Reed sat down abruptly, as abruptly as though his legs had given way under him.

Even his reflexes are shot, Georg thought. How easy this is going to be.

"Let me buy you a drink," he said softly. "What hurts most, hurts a little less with a drink."

"I have it right here," Reed said. "Come on up to my room."

Which was exactly what Georg had hoped for and wanted—but he hadn't dreamed it would come about so easily.

They went upstairs to the room. Reed took off his coat and tie, Georg just his coat. Reed disheveled the vivid-green wrapping paper from around the bottle. Georg set his attaché case on the floor, upright against his chair.

The wake began—and it was a wake in every sense of the

word. A lament for the dead. A valedictory for those soon to die.

The fiancé and the husband mourning the same woman.

Delphine. Delphine. Their voices brought her before them again, brought her back: In a yellow dress and a wide white hat she moved softly about their chairs. Now she placed her hand tenderly on Georg's shoulder, in old-time friendship. Now she bent down and pressed her cheek caressingly against Reed's in old-time love. Even her perfume was in the room—muguet, lily of the valley . . .

Suddenly Reed collapsed into his own lap, his face buried, his arms entwining it. His glass fell and rolled. The inch of taffy-colored residue it had held made a star-shaped puddle on the carpet, some of its rays longer than others.

His shoulders started to jitter ever so lightly, no more than when the skin crawls as it is being tickled with a feather or when a small insect walks across it. He held back even the smallest sob.

He didn't want the other man to see, to hear, to watch him. He got up stumblingly, face turned away, and went into the bathroom and closed the door behind him. He turned on the water of the shower, and

above its drumming came a sound like someone having a bad coughing spell.

Now the time for revenge had come.

There was a three-tiered dresser in the room, with two oblong drawers and two small square ones above them. Georg opened one of the latter and looked in. It held socks, handkerchiefs, and similar items of smaller personal linen. He closed it in rejection; it was too likely that Reed would go to it at least once a day to take out a fresh handkerchief.

The other small square drawer held a mare's-nest of neckties, not a single one of them folded the way it should have been. This was more to Georg's purpose. A man in Reed's present state of mind was not likely to bother about changing his necktie.

Georg unlatched the attaché case, took out two objects wrapped in newspaper, one rounded, the other thin but elongated. He placed them for a moment on the bureau, then pulled the mass of neckties to the front of the drawer so that a space was left in the rear.

He considered a moment, then made up his mind and unwrapped the two objects. One was revealed as a sizable bottle holding a colorless liquid. It was labeled: *Ouabaine—0.25*

mg. The second was simply an ordinary hypodermic needle.

He put them both in, spread out the neckties, and closed the drawer.

A moment later the shower in the bathroom stopped as abruptly as if it had been cut off by a switch.

*Document A (block-printed on ruled yellow paper, postmarked Ansonia Station, New York City):*

Mrs. Flora Marchand,  
Berkeley, Calif.

I am sorry if I add to your already overwelling (crossed out) great grief, but I must tell you that the death of your daughter was not from natural causes. It was brought about by an overdose of liquid digitalis, medically known as ouabaine. It was administrated (crossed out) given by hypodermic into the abdomidal (crossed out) stomach cavity. I lived in the same house with them and am in a position to know what I am saying.

A crime like this should not go unpunished.

An Honest Man

*Document B (also on ruled yellow paper, but typed; postmarked Times Square Station, New York City):*

To the Office of the Medical Examiner,

Department of Police, City  
of New York

Dear Sir or Sirs:

The death of Mrs. Delphine Newcomb on September 15 last was not due to natural causes, in spite of your findings. A re-examination will prove that ouabaine was administrated (crossed out) given past the tolerance level with intention to kill.

I can't understand how you missed finding this. It is your duty to reveal such a murder. You are supposed to be the protectors of the public.

An Honest Citizen

A turning point now came into Georg's campaign.

He was sure that exhumation had been carried out and the autopsy performed. A sufficient time had now elapsed since he had mailed the letters. But his reason for being sure involved one factor only. Not the Medical Examiner's office, not the police. They might or might not have believed his denunciation. Most likely they had not. They probably considered the letter the work of a crank and had simply pigeonholed it.

But there was Flora Marchand. He knew her well; and knew he could count on her. This increase to her already insupportable grief would force her to investigate, would give

her no rest until she had. She probably hoped the charge was unfounded, but she would be bitterly determined to make sure. Besides, she was already receptive—the ground had been prepared for him. He had remembered her remark on the phone: "A terrible thought occurred to us at first . . . her marriage to this man . . . we suspected the worst."

Suspicion hadn't died—it had only been allayed. His letter would rekindle it—into a flaming actuality. She would be his *dea ex machina*. She would force the thing through. And it was from her, from the dead girl's family, that the impetus should come. The police and the M.E.'s office, satisfied with their own documentation, could only be triggered into action by the family of the deceased.

Georg was now avid to have Reed punished. It was a veritable thirst, far worse than any bodily thirst he had ever known. A blood-thirst, in every sense of the word. He wasn't content merely to sit back and let events take their course. There was always a possibility that Reed might be able to talk his way out of the trap. In this respect, the original M.E.'s report was a big point in his favor, and one that Georg could never eliminate. He could only

hope, at best, to minimize it.

Thus Georg, having done all he could to incriminate Reed but deeply aware of the uncertainties still remaining, decided that Reed must also be made to incriminate himself. This would double his jeopardy, compound the suspicion cast on him. And the only way to have Reed incriminate himself was to frighten him into running away. The innocent sometimes lost their heads just as much as the guilty, Georg well knew. And the only way to frighten Reed into bolting was to tip him off, warn him of what was coming.

There was a risk here of destroying the very thing he had so painstakingly brought about, but Georg decided the advantages outweighed the dangers. Even if Reed stood his ground, foreknowledge might very well shatter his self-possession, make him appear guilty that much more.

The thing unfolded beautifully in its opening stages.

Georg called the hotel, and Reed answered from his room. This was about 8:30 in the morning.

"There's something urgent I've got to talk to you about—" Georg began.

"If you'd called five minutes later," Reed told him, "you'd have missed me. I just finished packing. I'm chucking law

school. I have my ticket in my pocket, and I'm taking the nine o'clock train to the Coast."

Georg couldn't believe his ears. This was perfect. It couldn't have been any better if he'd planned it that way. Reed's bag packed, his train ticket in his pocket. All the appearances of running away.

But Georg still wasn't satisfied—he had to give Reed the *coup de grace*.

"But you've got to listen to this," Georg insisted. "This is something you've got to hear."

"I don't want to hear anything. I've lost Delphine and that's all I care about."

"This concerns her," Georg said artfully.

That brought him up short.

"The body's been exhumed and they'll be around to question you at any moment. Poison was found in it."

The choking sound Reed made came clearly across the wire.

"What kind of poison?" he said finally.

"Ouabaine, better known as liquid digitalis. Point twenty-five milligrams is the normal dosage given in heart cases. Point fifty would be dangerous, and seventy-five deadly."

"I found some right here in the r—" Reed started to say, then he changed his mind. Instead he asked, "How do you

happen to know about it?"

"I have a friend in the M.E.'s office—a stenographer. She tipped me off that they're going to pick you up, and I thought the least I could do was warn you."

He waited a moment, to let the thing percolate through Reed's mind. Then he asked cagily, "Are you still going away?"

"Yes," Reed answered on a despairing note that was almost like a moan. He hung up abruptly without saying goodbye.

There was a burning light in Georg's eyes as he quitted the phone. He flung himself backward against the wall, arms outspread and legs wide apart so that his body formed an approximation of the letter X. His face straining upward and his body shuddering so that he trembled from head to foot, he cried out in his own seldom-used tongue.

Standing across the street facing the hotel entrance, Georg took up his vigil. He wanted the satisfaction of seeing his enemy flee and bring about his own downfall. The minute hand of his watch toiled slowly toward nine.

Georg shifted weight expectantly. What was holding Reed up? He had said he was all

packed. In a few more minutes he was going to be late for his train.

Georg walked as far as the near corner. He could still see the entrance from there perfectly. He saw a garish orange-and-red taxicab draw up to the entrance, and for a moment he thought Reed had sent for it. But a man on crutches came out of the hotel and was helped into the cab by the doorman.

Now Georg had crossed over to the matching corner on the hotel side. He lit a cigarette, threw it away. It was 8:50. Then it was 8:51. He took out another cigarette, didn't light it, threw that one away, too.

Suddenly, without realizing that he had moved at all, Georg was outside the hotel entrance itself. It was 8:55. Reed had missed the train. Had he decided to take a later one, or had he changed his mind altogether?

Irresistibly as a nail is drawn to a magnet, Georg went inside.

Reed's bag, packed and ready to go, was standing in the hall outside his room door. He must have gone back inside for something at the last minute. Georg waited, watching, but when Reed didn't come out, Georg approached the door and tapped lightly.

No answer.

## MURDER AFTER DEATH

He tried it. The door had been left unlocked. Georg looked in.

The first thing he saw was Reed lying on the bed, as normally and composedly as if he'd lain down to rest for a moment before going to the train, and had inadvertently dozed off. One arm was bent across his eyes, as if to shield them from the bright morning light streaming in through the open window.

He was fully clothed, except for his jacket, and he'd loosened his tie into a slipknot. One shirt sleeve had been pushed far up, almost to his shoulder, and the telltale hypodermic lay on the bed, alongside that arm. The bottle was on the nightstand beside the bed.

Georg put his hand on the inert wrist. The body was still warm, but the pulse had stopped. He must have only just died, while Georg was waiting outside on the street.

The note was on the table. It said briefly:

*They tell me there are other girls. They lie. Somebody told me about this stuff. I'm going to try it myself. Here goes nothing at all—to nowhere at all on a one-way ticket. Give the money in my wallet to the cleaning woman. She's a kind old lady. Give my watch to the*

*elevator man. I've seen him admiring it. Throw the rest of me out with the litter.*

Georg's first impulse was to fold it and put it away in his pocket for safekeeping. Then he realized that if it should ever become necessary to produce it, he'd be revealing his visit to Reed's room. So he put it back where he'd found it.

He was bitterly disappointed. His triumph had been cut in half. True, Reed was dead, as Georg had wanted him to be. But not in the way he had wanted. Reed had escaped the months of long-drawn-out confinement, the final branding as a murderer in the eyes of the world, and the ultimate horrors of a legalized execution that Georg had wanted Reed to experience.

He returned to where the body lay, picked up the hypodermic, and eyed it almost accusingly, as if it were something animate that had betrayed him of its own will.

Neither of the two men in the doorway had spoken or moved, but suddenly Georg knew someone was standing there and his head snapped around. The hypo fell on top of Reed's body.

They came all the way in then, giving the door a great swing-around that funneled a draft into the room and sent

the curtains leaping out the open window.

Nothing was said. It was like something being acted out in grim and deadly pantomime. One of them took a twist on Georg's coatsleeve, gripped him by the slack of the coat collar, and held him pinned that way. The other one examined Reed, drew up one of his dead eyelids, then turned around and nodded with his mouth pressed tight. He lined his hand with a handkerchief and picked up the hypodermic in it.

Georg broke the unbearable silence at last, before they did. He couldn't hold out.

"I found him like this when I came in the room just now. He did it himself. There's a note on the table that will tell you—"

The three of them turned to look. There was no note to be seen on the table, nor on the floor, nor anywhere else in the room.

Georg's body gave a heave of dismay, and then sank back. He would have collapsed if the man hadn't been holding him so tight.

"It must have blown out the window when you opened the door!" he cried out hoarsely. "Send someone down after it, quick! For God's sake, send someone down to look for it!"

"We will," one of them said

stonily. "You can be sure of that." He went to the phone, probably to call downstairs to a patrolman who had been posted outside the hotel entrance.

Cold sweat broke out along Georg's hairline. He was visualizing those hundreds of heedless feet trudging and scuffing the sidewalks down there. Those numberless drainage sewers, those countless basement grates. Those acres and acres of rooftops—yes, even in New York there are many rooftops that are comparatively low—with the wind blowing free across them.

Somehow he knew . . .

"For a student pharmacist," the one gripping him said, "you're a very stupid man. Didn't you realize that the circulation stops as soon as death occurs? Nothing moves any longer, nothing is carried by it. The whole injection was found at the point of entry, Why, even the small puncture in the skin made by the needle hadn't closed up, as it would have in living tissue."

"Everything you did was a dead giveaway."

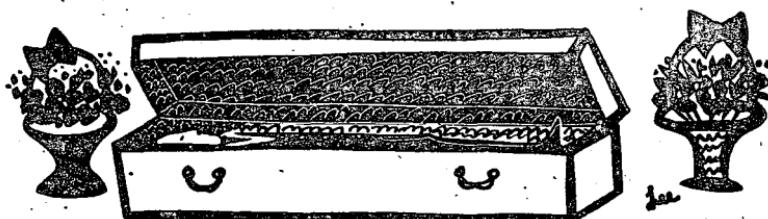
"I admit nothing," Georg scowled with his characteristic peasant obstinacy. "But still and all, suppose for the sake of argument this is so; that the body was already dead when someone injected a poisonous

substance into it. Then what could you hold him on? Surely not murder."

"We're not acting on that case," the man said. "This is the case we're acting on—this one right here. Everything depends on how this needle and this bottle of liquid check out. And they should be easier to trace than a gun. If it turns out this

man bought them himself, then you have nothing to worry about. But if it turns out you were the one who bought them, or got hold of them in some way, then we have our case made."

Georg stepped through the open doorway between the two of them, the glaze of oncoming doom already in his eyes.



# Charlotte Armstrong

## More Than One Kind of Luck

*Charles Castle was not really a con man—he was something far more deadly. And Mimi Meade was not really a foolish old woman—or was she?... by one of the true Mistresses of Mystery in her time...*

The bearded man was sprawled on a sofa in the sitting room of Suite 209 at the Belmont Hotel. His full red lips moved greedily to suck in a green grape; the beard moved as his teeth crushed it. He was not an old man.

"I'm only asking you to move faster, Chic," said his visitor, a neutral-looking man called Johnson. "Because I can't stand the pace. It's costing too much," he complained. "You don't seem to realize. I don't live in any suite like this. I should start getting a little return on my investment. If you asked me up here to tell me there's another delay..."

The bearded man, who was calling himself Charles Castle, spat out a grape seed.

"I'm not trying to pressure you because I want to," said Johnson. "It's just a fact of life. The capital is running out."

"If you'd lay off the horses,

the facts of life wouldn't be so limiting," said Castle sourly.

"Never mind what I do. What's holding you up this time?"

"I can't stand the old crow's conversation," Castle said, and his eyes flashed rage.

"For the profit in this, you should be able to stand anything."

"You can talk—you're capital. I'm labor." The man with the beard grinned, but there was no improvement in his mood. His personality was thunderous this Saturday morning.

Johnson's quiet voice took on a nasty edge. "You were in a bad spot, Chic. On the run. Broke. Nobody to turn to. Now you stand to live in luxury the rest of your life. What's wrong with that?"

"That's how it looks to you, eh? You want to know how it looks to me?"

The other did not, but he resigned himself to being told.

"You put up the money for this set-up because I've got to live comfortably and make it look good—the hotel, the clothes, the price of the dinners and shows. Right?"

"That's right."

"And what do I put in?" said Castle. "My time. My trouble. My charm. I have to be there. I have to look at her. I have to listen to her conversation. Right?"

"For two million dollars."

"Which, in order to get, I have to marry her. So then you get your money back, plus interest—plenty of interest. That's how it looks to you." He ripped grapes off the stem. "But to me, that's where it goes sour."

"What's so sour?"

"Because marrying the old bag means I have to keep on putting in my time, my trouble, my person. The labor, Johnson. The labor. You keep collecting but where am I? I'm in a cage. I'm the gilded bird. I wouldn't be able to take it." His strong teeth mutilated the innocent fruit.

"Listen," said Johnson wearily. "We agreed, didn't we?"

Castle sat up. "Makes' no difference what we agreed," he said viciously. "I'd kill her in two weeks." He glared at the

wall. "I mean that. I know myself, Johnson. I'd strangl her. I wouldn't be able to help myself." The hands that he held out were ready now.

Johnson's undistinguished countenance turned bleak. He knew the truth when he heard it.

Castle got up and took a tighter hitch on the sash of his deep-red dressing gown. "You'll agree that wouldn't get u anywhere. If I marry Mrs Meade and then kill her, which is what would happen, it's going to be obvious. The cops wil catch on, very quickly, to the fact that she had no charm and I had no money." His mouth sneered in its frame of hair. "You don't think I'd inherit, do you? You don't think I'd be left loose to keep slipping along those little payments to you?"

Johnson's face was long. "Why you had to take such a dislike to her, I don't know. You should get over it, Chic," he pleaded. "Think of what she's worth. Be times you'd like to choke her, sure. But for two million dollars—"

"No." Castle took a turn on the carpet and swung around. "I wasn't built for bars and I'm not going to walk into a cage. I just don't kid myself. I can't stand her." His eyes glittered. "The way I feel, I doubt if I can trust myself even to take her to

lunch today, as I'm supposed to do."

"Don't take her to lunch, then," said Johnson hoarsely. "But you'll have to check out of here."

"Now, now, now," said Castle. "I didn't get you up here to say I was quitting. How would it be if we dropped the original idea and I just took the diamonds? Give us both a return on our investment."

Johnson swallowed. "You got to know the ropes, Chic. You never was a jewel thief."

"It's okay with you if I do? Be better than a total loss."

"Okay, if you could get away with it," began Johnson nervously, "but—"

"Same split?"

"What do you mean the same split," said Johnson indignantly. "I was willing to settle for a percentage on a steady income deal, but this would be one haul, Chic, a one-shot."

"Half?"

"You're getting generous with what you haven't got," said Johnson bitterly. "You got a plan how you can get away with the diamonds?"

"We have tickets to the concert tonight," Castle said briskly. "Dressy affair. She's getting the diamonds from the bank right now. She'll have the necklace, the earrings, the

tiara—the works—hung on her for the occasion."

"Well?"

"So I remove same."

"How?"

"Leave that to me." Castle's eyes were hooded.

"Then you'll run? With that beard?" Johnson said sharply. "They'd pick you up in half an hour."

"Oh, I have that worked out. All I'll need is a little help from you at the right moment."

Johnson stiffened. "Listen, Chic, just because I saw a little opportunity here with this rich old dame, and I took a little gamble, that don't mean..."

"I know where to turn the stones to cash. A safe connection."

"It's too dangerous, Chic."

"Listen. Two days ago she announced our engagement, didn't she? Fifty old hens, cackling, and me in the middle." Castle shuddered. "They know I stand to gain the two million and the diamonds. Everybody knows that. Right?"

Johnson didn't say anything. His face turned bleaker.

"So somebody robs her. So it's my loss, too, isn't it? Do I get suspected?"

Johnson's mouth smiled without humor.

"And if I've got a perfect alibi for the time of the robbery as well... There is where you

can do some good." Castle sat down suddenly and leaned back. "Of course, if you don't like it . . ." He shrugged. But he watched.

The other man thought a while. His lashes worked rapidly. Then he said in a cool thin voice, "I'm interested in a return on my money. But not prison."

"Nobody's going to prison."

"No? What's with her all the time you're taking the jewelry off her? Is she blind? Can't she squawk?"

"There's no danger," said Charles Castle impatiently.

"How," said Johnson, "do you figure that?"

There was time out. Then the man with the beard said coldly, "Because she won't be able to squawk."

"I thought so," said Johnson in the same thin voice. "You're no con man. You're a killer. I should have known."

"I can't run," said Castle savagely. "You said so yourself. I know how to take the diamonds and leave nobody talking. All you have to do is help out with the alibi."

Johnson shook his head.

"So you want to wash it up as of now?" Castle fingered the grapes. "Take the loss? Forget it?" He fell back on the sofa and stretched his long legs. "Okay, I can do without you."

He thumb-brushed the bloom off a grapeskin. "Won't be so safe, of course. And if I'm caught, you're in for a *little* bother . . ."

The other man began to perceive that he had better protect his investment. He said mildly, "What do you think the diamonds would bring, Chic?"

Charles Castle smiled in his beard.

A little after two o'clock that afternoon Mrs. Lydia Coonley, Mrs. Mimi Meade's housekeeper, neat in her black-and-white, opened the door for Mrs. Meade and her escort.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Coonley," the escort said.

"Afternoon, Mr. Castle." Mrs. Coonley nodded to Gustav, the chauffeur, who followed his mistress carrying a black, suede-covered box. Mrs. Coonley's round blue eyes turned in her plump fresh-colored face, and her small pink mouth tightened as she took it from him. Gustav stepped back to wait beside the door.

Charles Castle's voice sweetened. "Forgive me if I must hurry away so early, Mimi darling." Mrs. Coonley watched the beard bend to the freckled claw of her employer. "If I'm to dine here," said Castle, "there are some dull matters I must attend to."

"White tie, Charles," Mrs. Meade said in her piercing soprano. She was a bit hard of hearing.

"If you say so." He was a foot taller than his fiancée, and looked twenty years younger.

Her head with its dyed-black hair lifted, and her faded eyes looked up a little blindly at his splendor. "You are the best-looking thing, Charles," she screamed. "You'll look so distinguished! I think I'll wear green."

"Ah," he said, "thank you. White roses, if I can find them?"

"You spoil me."

"I try."

"Let Gustav run you back downtown. Shall I send the car again at seven?"

"You spoil me, you know."

"I enjoy it," she shrieked. "Until seven, then. Oh, wait, Lydia," said Mrs. Meade to her housekeeper, "you have the box. Would you fetch the key? Charles, do let me show you my pretty beads and things."

"Diamonds?" he said, rather coolly. His eye flicked to Mrs. Coonley's face. "No, dearest. They'll have no character in the box. Can't I wait to see them properly? When you wear them this evening?" Mimi's chin drew in with her pleasure. "Now I must rush, if you'll forgive me."

Mimi forgave him. Her vague

eyes let him go. He went briskly, not forgetting to say, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Coonley," as he left, followed by Gustav.

Mimi sighed. "I think I'll go straight up. A massage, Lydia? And then a nap. I must look as well as I can. The diamonds will help. Bring the box, dear." She sighed again and set her aching old foot in the high-heeled sandal on the stair. "I'm an old fool, Lydia," she remarked, "but I must say I've never had so much fun for my money."

Lydia Coonley's smile was fond. "Just so you're happy," she said, "and he isn't mean to you."

"Mean? Oh, no. Charles will never be mean to me."

Lydia's strong body was close as they climbed, as if to support and protect the older woman. "Mimi," she said in Mrs. Meade's ear, for they were excellent friends, "you don't really intend to marry him, do you?"

"No, no, although I'm sometimes tempted. But you can be sure," Mimi screeched confidently, "he'll never be mean to me unless I marry him."

"I hope," said Mrs. Coonley, "you won't change your mind about that. I worry..."

"There now, Lydia, you needn't," said her friend and

employer. "I'm a rich old woman, and I shan't forget it. Though he is a gorgeous thing, Lydia, don't you think so?"

Lydia Coonley did not altogether agree, but she murmured, "I suppose I see what you mean."

Sometime later, Mrs. Coonley said urgently to her nephew, George, on the telephone, "I tell you it is important, George! Couldn't you find out anything?"

"Listen, Aunt Lydia, I'm a third-grade detective, not Sherlock Holmes. I asked around, and he isn't known."

"Charles Castle doesn't have to be his right name. Did you get your friend to look at him?"

"Not yet."

"Will you do that, George? Please?"

"Inspector Cameron isn't my friend," Aunt Lydia."

"Camera, I thought you called him."

"He's called that because of his camera eye—never forgets a face. Well, I asked him to take a look at this Charles Castle and he said he would. But I dunno when, Aunt Lydia."

"Get him to do it as soon as you can, George. I don't like to frighten Mrs. Meade, but I'm so afraid she'll marry him, and I honestly don't think she'd be able to handle him. It worries

me a lot. They're eating here tonight and going to the concert. Use your influence, George, please?"

"Aunt Lydia, I've got no influence," said George patiently. "I can only ask Inspector Cameron again."

"That's a good boy."

Charles Castle dismissed the chauffeur at the far side of the small park. He told Gustav—establishing a precedent—that he would walk through the park to his hotel.

He had nothing more to attend to physically. The scheme was set, purchases carefully made, timing checked. All it needed now was a little brooding over the details of his own behavior. He walked restlessly in the small rain, ignored the hotel, and turned into the first barbershop he saw.

It seemed that only one man in the shop knew how to trim a beard, and he was busy. It was becoming a lost art, the chubby little proprietor told him. The proprietor said to a barber at the last chair, "You think you can take care of this gentleman?"

Charles Castle climbed into the chair and relaxed. "Make me—look pretty," he said cheerfully. "Real pretty, for a lady."

"Yes, sir."

Tonight. At the concert. He would mention a headache to Mimi. Afterward, while Gustav was driving them back to her house, his headache would become "worse." On arrival there he would be "in great pain." Ask to be excused immediately. But set up in her mind the certainty that he would phone the moment he got to his suite. That meant she would be downstairs, waiting for his call—she disliked telephones because of her deafness and had no extension upstairs. Very good.

Next—if she offered, and she would—he would let Gustav drive him as far as the park. There he would use the headache again, tell Gustav he needed the air and would walk across the park to the hotel. Here he must watch the timing. It was his responsibility to see that it came out right. He would take care to impress the exact time on Gustav.

But he would not walk through the park to the hotel. He would get into the car already parked near where he intended to tell Gustav to let him out, and he would follow the chauffeur back to Mimi's house. Take care to see the man safely up her driveway and into the garage where he slept, too. She'd be downstairs at the

window where the phone was, waiting for his call. All he would need to do was to attract her attention through the windowpane. She would open the door for him herself. Just let her see him. He had full confidence in his power to wrap all this in the strong flavor of romance. Stricken with remorse for his rudeness in leaving her so abruptly. Returned to beg her pardon. And one last kiss. But he must maneuver Mrs. Coonley out of the midnight picture.

In his absorption he had not heard what the barber—a slim, dark-eyed, nervous man—had been saying. Some complaint. The sense of it lingered. Castle roused himself. His eye travelled. "What happened to your mirror?" Now he could see a piece of cloth draped half over it.

"It just broke," the barber said, in a voice that grated. "What I'm telling you! I didn't do it! I absolutely didn't do it. He can't say I did it!"

"Just broke, eh?"

"I walk up to the chair. I'm standing here. Cra-ack. How could I have broke it?"

"Funny," said Castle genially. "Seven years' bad luck for somebody, so they say." He was not a superstitious man.

The scissors began to click in the barber's hand. Castle closed

his eyes and concentrated on the problem of Mrs. Coonley. Suppose he were to hint to Mimi, before they left for the concert, that when they returned there would be some smooching? He shuddered. But it was bound to work. Surely Mimi would then order Coonley not to wait up. Coonley would obey, and her room was far from the entrance hall. And of course there was no need to shudder, because the smooching would not be of the kind that Mimi expected.

He did not know why he hated her so. It infuriated him that she swallowed his outrageous flattery so easily. Sometimes, in fact, he felt as if he were being deliberately lured into overplaying his part. Again and again he dismissed that idea. No, no, she was too vain and stupid.

His gorge rose, thinking of the silly old crow. She thought he would marry such-as-her? Or, contrarily, she thought she was toying with such-as-him? Either way, she would pay for it. Tonight. His hands under the barber's cloth were tight and eager. The diamonds hardly entered into his pleasure at all.

Yes, he thought, it was going to be very satisfying and very safe. A perfect alibi, and apparently so much to lose. Oh, they would suspect him; quite

automatically. But this would be quickly damped down by "the facts" . . .

That was when the feel of cold shears on his cheek made Castle sit up, roaring, in the chair.

"Oh, gentleman . . ." The barber stepped back, scissors clicking nervously. "I wasn't thinking . . ."

"You crazy or something?" the proprietor came bellowing. "The gentleman said 'Trim'!"

The barber looked half mad. "It was the mirror breaking. It wasn't me. Seven years' bad luck. Bad luck," he kept murmuring.

He had snipped one side of Castle's beard down to an almost invisible stubble.

As the other half of his beard was vanishing under the skillful hands of the proprietor himself, Charles Castle did not listen to the stream of apology, of gratitude for his "decency," of explanation. He was contemplating his personal disaster. He had got his rage under quick control. Don't impress anyone in the barber shop with the idea that the beard had been *important*. Be forbearing. Be reasonable. Be "decent." Be forgotten.

"Personally, there's no such thing as luck, good or bad, I say," the proprietor was babbling. "That's not scientific."

"That's right," Castle said absently.

When he hurried out of the shop into the afternoon rain, he tried to pull his naked face down into his jacket collar. What to do? He spotted a drug store, went in, and bought some of the covering paste that women use on blemishes. There was that intricate way to get up to his hotel room without being seen, and he used it.

At once, Castle tried to reach Johnson, who was staying in a cheap boarding house where the phone was a community affair, for emergencies only. A voice said that Mr. Johnson was not there. It seemed to the voice that Mr. Johnson had said something about going to the races. Something about he knew a horse that could run in the rain.

Castle gnashed and swore. He went into the bathroom and smeared the cosmetic over the blue birthmark which lay, shaped like Lake Champlain, along his jaw. The paste was concealing enough at a distance, and in poor light. But . . .

Hell to pay! He had to go somewhere for a long time and lie very low. The pretty scheme, of course, was impossible now. No fooling around with the chauffeur, the headache, the timing—none of that driving back and forth. He would

simply go into the house with her, and kill her, and run.

He dreaded the concert. Could he do it before they left the house? No, not with the servants awake and around. It had to be after the concert. But soon after. Quick attack, and flight. It was that and the diamonds. Or it was flight and nothing.

He tried the phone again with no better luck. He hoped angrily that Johnson was losing his shirt on the races. Finally he began to dress. The paste on his jaw was too conspicuous. He thought of a piece of adhesive tape. Then he thought not. The hell with it. Risk it. *Do it.*

His hands trembled. He tried the phone once more. Still no Johnson. Well, no matter. The old crow would die. He would run. Johnson would never see him—or any of the diamonds.

As she served the hors d'oeuvres, Mrs. Coonley's eyes were as round as onions. Mimi Meade kept looking at her fiancé in the merciful candlelight as if he were a stranger. "Oh, Charles," she screamed. "Why ever did you do that!"

"My darling, I did it to please you," he said gallantly. "Was I wrong?"

"You have a strong face. A very strong face," she shrieked. "But I did think your beard was

distinguished-looking. I am sorry."

"Did you love me for my beard alone?" he teased, impatient for midnight and her throat.

Mimi laughed so raucously that all her diamonds shook. But he saw Mrs. Coonley's mouth make a pink button, and Castle received, intuitively, the news that now he could not marry the \$2,000,000 dollars even if he wanted to. Beardless, the old crow wouldn't have him.

His rage turned hard as ice, and as cold.

After dinner, holding Mimi's wrap, he whispered that there were things to discuss, intimate plans to be made, decisions to be taken. Could they be alone when they got back from the concert? He thought she stiffened at his word "decisions." But she screeched to Mrs. Coonley, docilely enough, her injunction not to wait up.

He was satisfied. When they returned here, he would give the burly chauffeur a good quarter of an hour to lock the garage and be off to bed. If Mrs. Coonley disobeyed her employer and waited up, why, it would be easy enough to get rid of her, too. What was one more?

"Good night, sir and ma'am," Mrs. Coonley said. "Enjoy the music."

"Thank you," Castle said. "Good night." His cold eyes slipped over the housekeeper's face and he smiled.

When they had gone, Mrs. Coonley sighed deeply. "Well," she said aloud.

As she went about turning off lights, preparing to go to her room, the phone rang. "Aunt Lydia?"

"Oh, George."

She sounded as if she couldn't quite place him for a moment, George thought. "I got Inspector Cameron to promise he'll meet me after his poker game tonight. So where will Castle be around midnight?"

"Oh. Oh, yes, let me see. Why, I suppose he'll be getting back to his hotel about then. The Belmont."

"Okay. We'll be hanging around the lobby."

"Good boy," said his aunt absently. "But I think everything's going to be all right anyway, George."

"What's that?"

"She's going to break the engagement."

"She is?"

"Oh, I'm positive she will. He's shaved off his beard." George's Aunt Lydia gave a little giggle. "Mrs. Meade is all upset. Now he looks thirty years younger than she, instead of twenty. She'll never marry him."

"Then you mean," said George in distress, "I've been hounding Inspector Cameron—?"

"I think he's got something smeared on his face," his aunt went on happily. "Looks as if he's trying to hide a scar that was under the beard before. You better see if your friend knows his real name, Georgie. Now I'm *positive* he's a criminal."

"Well," said George, sounding dubious, "okay then."

The concert was a success. There were encores. Then the audience, dressed to the teeth, left the hall very slowly, bowing and preening its fine feathers. Mimi seemed annoyed that Charles, much less flamboyant and forceful than usual, did not clear her way, but let her be buffeted with the rest. They found Gustav and the car, and rode in silence.

It was not quite midnight when the car pulled up under Mrs. Meade's porte cochere. She had been thinking of Samson. "Charles," she said decisively, "you must come in. Shall we let Gustav go to bed? You can call a cab later. We must have a talk."

"Yes," Castle said. "Of course. By all means!"

Detective George Coonley

leaned on the desk at the Belmont. Inspector Cameron, stolid beside him, was letting George do it. "Charles Castle hasn't come in yet, has he?" George inquired.

"Yes, sir," the man said promptly. "Just about five minutes ago. I saw him starting up the stairs. He always walks up—his room is only one flight up."

George felt terrible. He squinted unhappily toward the stairway. (The great Cameron doing him this favor, and they were too late! George felt young and green and futile.) "Are you sure?" he demanded with a desperate ferocity. "Absolutely *sure* it was Castle you saw? That stairway is pretty far from the desk here."

"Positive," said the man. "He gave me the salute he always gives. Anyhow, I couldn't miss that beard of his."

George Coonley was young and green, but he was not stupid. Even as the great Cameron had already begun to turn away, George stiffened.

"What beard?" he asked.

Mimi Meade felt the cruel thumbs striking into her flesh. She saw, as her frantic old hands pushed and slipped on the grim jaw, the blue mark emerging. She lost the light...

Mrs. Coonley, on the stairs, didn't scream. She ran down toward the hammering shadows assaulting the front door. Then George was inside, bending the killer's left arm impossibly backward. Lydia Coonley caught Mrs. Meade's falling, but breathing, body.

Inspector Cameron said, "Birthmark. Yep. This is Chic Hutt from Boston. Wanted for murder."

"Now that we got him," panted George, "how about calling the Belmont, sir—see if they got whoever was giving him the alibi with the beard?"

"You hardly ever see a beard nowadays," croaked Mimi Meade, pulling at her necklace—some of the diamonds were embedded in her flesh. "My father used to wear a beard..."

"Hush," said Lydia Coonley. "I've called the doctor. I'll get you to bed." (A fuss will be made, her manner promised fondly.) "George," she beamed at her nephew, "I'm real proud of you."

George shushed her. Inspector Cameron was on the phone.

"Got his alibi man," he said to George in a moment. "Horse-happy con artist named Johnson. He didn't know about the beard being gone. How come you cut it off?" the Inspector asked Chic Hutt. "Bad mistake, wasn't it?"

"Bad luck," growled Chic, alias Charles Castle.

Later, George, waiting beside Inspector Cameron at Headquarters, said, "Wasn't it luck, though? Nothing *but* luck?"

The Inspector said kindly, "You don't want to get confused, son—there's more than one kind of luck. 'Bad luck,' he said. But he forgot a couple of things. First, he didn't *have* to go ahead and try to murder the old lady. Second, any *innocent* man could have got his beard taken off by mistake, and no harm done to anyone. And what definitely *wasn't* luck at all, my boy, was that you were awful quick to see that bit about the beard."

# Margery Sharp

## Driving Home

*When this story first appeared in "Good Housekeeping," it was introduced as follows: "How far will a woman go to establish an alibi? Really, to the end of the world, to the gallows" . . .*

*A fascinating story of crime and detection by one of the most admired writers of our time . . .*

Henry Chevron was driving home to London after a day in the country when he remembered that he had promised to bring his wife a dozen fresh eggs. He was an architect, and the trip had been one of business, not pleasure—to advise on the conversion of a stately home into a Country Club—but his client had provided an excellent lunch, and this made Henry all the more anxious to procure Catherine her eggs. For half the ten years of their marriage they had been a very attached couple, and now that their attachment had worn away, they clung all the more, in all their dealings with each other, to this sort of playing fair.

Henry slowed down to 20. In the next village a crudely lettered sign, FRESH PRODUCE, caught his eye, so he stopped outside the small brick

cottage and sounded his horn. After a few moments a young woman emerged and looked at him impatiently.

"Eggs?" asked Henry.

"Sorry, we haven't got none," she snapped.

Henry asked if she knew where he might be luckier.

"Well, you could try Mrs. Cox. She's at the other end," the young woman said. "If you'll 'scuse me, we're watching the television."

She turned and immediately went in again. Henry leaned on his horn and shouted for further directions. Of what the young woman called over her shoulder he distinguished only one word. It sounded like "witch." From a patron of television this seemed unlikely. Henry shrugged and drove on, but slowly, in case Mrs. Cox, witch or no, had a sign out saying EGGS.

At the end of the little street he found what he was looking for—not a sign, but a dwelling slightly larger than the rest, with the name *Wychwood Cot* fading on its gate. Henry grinned to himself, stopped again, and got out.

No one answered his ring, but he knew enough of country ways to go round to the back and try there. The garden behind was a mere strip of grass terminated by a tall gaping hedge with apple trees showing above; more importantly, about this apology for a lawn strayed several hens. Henry knocked at the back door and waited.

Again no one answered. He stepped back a pace or two and looked up for a television aerial. It was there all right, and no doubt Mrs. Cox was inside, glued to her set. To step in and call out seemed the only plan; the knob turned easily under his hand, and Henry tentatively entered—and at the same moment was himself transfixated by a screech from the rear. Up from the apple orchard an old, old woman came running, screeching her head off.

"What do you want? Who are you? What do you want in my house?" she screamed.

Henry waited until she was beside him and then explained his errand.

"I can't hear you, I'm deaf!"

shouted the woman, and with a strong old hand on his wrist held him firmly where he was. He wouldn't have been surprised if she'd blown a police whistle. "Who are you?" she repeated furiously. "What's your name?"

There was no reason why Henry should tell her, but he did. It seemed, at the moment, impossible not to. Of course she couldn't hear. She pulled him into the kitchen and indicated on the drainboard a paper bag and a pencil.

"Go on, write who you are," she ordered, and Henry obediently wrote his name, adding the query, "Eggs?"

"Never heard of you!" the old woman shouted. "Don't sell eggs! Go away, go away!"

Henry was only too glad to. Actually, a hundred yards farther on he came to a gate lettered *Wychwood Farm*, and there bought a dozen fresh eggs without the least difficulty. It slightly disturbed him, he didn't know why, that he'd left his name with Mrs. Cox (who presumably wasn't Mrs. Cox at all). He didn't know why, but he wished he hadn't; and to forget the episode all the sooner, he said nothing about it to his wife.

He got in about eight, and they dined together as usual in the restaurant attached to their

apartment hotel. Their apartment included a kitchenette, and in the first years of their marriage they had often dined there—Catherine cooking while Henry looked on, then both of them doing the dishes to sugary music on the radio; but the habit had lapsed along with many others, and now Catherine used the kitchen only to cook herself a luncheon omelet. It was simpler just to eat in the restaurant; also, a little conversation with neighboring diners covered any silence between themselves.

"I shouldn't mind an early bedtime," Henry said as they finished dinner. "I'm rather tired."

Catherine didn't inquire into his day's events. If she had, he might have inquired into hers; as it was, he didn't notice the omission.

It was in the next day's evening paper that he saw the paragraph with his own name in it. If it hadn't been for the name, he mightn't have noticed the item at all.

It was quite a short paragraph: the old woman of Wychwood Cot, even beaten and robbed, rated no more in the London press. But one's eye notoriously picks out, from any page of print, one's own name; and beneath the headline,

MOTORIST MAY AID POLICE, an obviously official release expressed Scotland Yard's desire to interview a Mr. Henry Chevron—in connection (Henry read on) with an attack the previous evening on Mrs. Selina Louisa Parkin, 70, of Wychwood Cot, Skrimbles, Oxfordshire.

Absurdly enough, Henry's first thought was that he'd been right about her not being Mrs. Cox. She wasn't; she was Mrs. Parkin.

Of course he put the frivolous point aside at once. He wasn't exactly worried, but he saw the need to clear things up as soon as possible. When he read the paragraph, he was already on his way home, by subway, from his office, and there seemed no point in getting off to telephone when he could do so ten minutes later from his own apartment.

His decision to contact the police was instant, and solid—their investigation of himself was obviously pure routine, necessary if tiresome, and the sooner dealt with the better. Henry Chevron was both a sensible man and a good citizen. He returned to the paragraph with calm, and from it learned that Mrs. Parkin had been struck on the head with a blunt instrument, and was discovered, still unconscious, still clutching

an empty handbag, next morning by the milkman.

"I'll telephone as soon as I get in," Henry said to himself.

As it turned out, he had no need to. The police were waiting for him.

"You've been quick," said Henry.

It wasn't what he'd have said if he'd thought. But he hadn't had time to think. Letting himself in with his key, heading straight for the telephone in the living room, he hadn't thought even what he'd say to Catherine.

The policeman smiled modestly.

"It's an unusual name, sir. Chevron is a very unusual name."

"I was just going to telephone you," said Henry. "I only read about it on my way home. I was just going to telephone you."

"Why do you both have to say everything twice over?" asked Catherine irritably. "Won't that make it all take twice as long?"

Henry glanced at her. She was irritated, possibly nervous, but some marital sixth sense told him she didn't yet know what it was all about.

"Hasn't he told you?" Henry asked, in marital code.

"I've only just got here," interposed the policeman.

"I've only just come in myself," said Catherine. "He was waiting outside. He just asked—"

"You haven't seen an evening paper?"

She shook her head.

"Then you'd better know," said Henry, "that an old woman I tried to buy eggs from last night has been hit over the head. Hence the investigation—initiated, as I remarked before, with commendable speed."

Surprisingly, it was the policeman who thrust a hand under Catherine's elbow. Henry, seeing her sway, simply felt all his wife's irritation transferred to himself. There was, after all, nothing to faint about.

"If I may say so, sir, a little sudden," rebuked the policeman, carefully assisting Catherine to the sofa. But it seemed he wasn't really cross with Henry either; again he smiled his modest smile. "As for speed, I only wish all our jobs were so easy. You left, as you might say, your card; and at Wychwood Farm, where you bought eggs— You did buy eggs there, sir?"

"Certainly," Henry agreed. "One dozen fresh."

"There they fancied you were heading for London. So it was really very simple, you being the only Chevron in the Directory. And now, sir, if you

care to tell me anything you know of Mrs. Parkin—describe your visit to her, and so on—it may help us to get the picture and we mayn't need to trouble you any further."

"The picture of what?" Henry asked. "Is it murder yet, or is she still alive?"

The moment after he spoke he knew, again, that it wasn't what he'd have said if he'd thought. Some words are dangerous in themselves. The word murder is dangerous. But the policeman's regard continued mild.

"Certainly Mrs. Parkin is still alive, sir. Only she can't give any evidence just yet. Now, sir, if you're willing to help—"

For a moment Henry thought of demanding his lawyer, but such a course was obviously unnecessary, and irritation had made him behave foolishly enough already. He nodded cooperatively, and the policeman nodded pleasantly back.

"When you called on Mrs. Parkin, sir—"

"Wait," said Henry. "I didn't call on Mrs. Parkin at all. Not in the social sense. I didn't know her; I didn't even know her name until I saw it in this evening's paper. I went in—"

"You do admit entering, sir?"

"Naturally. I left my name

on a paper bag. No doubt you've got it, it's my writing, any expert could prove it. But I don't like the word 'admit.' I'm not 'admitting' anything. I'm—relating."

"It was just a form of speech," apologized the policeman.

"I still don't like it," said Henry loudly.

He became aware that Catherine was trying to catch his eye, that she wanted to interrupt, and he motioned her angrily to silence. He knew he was losing his temper and that it was foolish, but her interference wouldn't help him keep it.

With an effort he continued more blandly, "Let's say, officer, I agree I entered, as you put it, a house called Wychwood Cot, whose owner I didn't know from Adam, yesterday evening on my way back to town, with the idea of buying eggs. Will that do?"

"According to our information, sir, Mrs. Parkin didn't sell eggs."

Henry controlled himself.

"I mistook the directions given me by a young woman farther down the street. Obviously she directed me to Wychwood Farm; I went to Wychwood Cot. The back door being unlatched, I entered. Mrs. Parkin, whose identity I did not

then know, appeared at the same moment from the orchard. In the course of an extremely tiresome and fruitless conversation, she being deaf as a doorpost, I wrote my name on a paper bag. I then went away empty-handed, leaving the lady, I assure you, unbeaten. I suppose the time—”

“Henry!” cried Catherine.

“Will you, for heaven’s sake, leave this to me!” shouted Henry. “The time, officer, was then probably six-fifteen.”

The policeman sighed.

“It’s a pity, sir.”

“What’s a pity?” snapped Henry.

“Mrs. Chevron, sir, just told me, just before you came in, you were home last night by six.”

There are moments when the presence of a third party does not in the least inhibit a matrimonial exchange. Henry swung round on Catherine exactly as though they were alone.

“You said I was *here*? Will you for heaven’s sake tell me why?”

Catherine straightened her back against the petit-point cushions of the sofa. “I thought perhaps you’d been speeding,” she said.

“If I had; what an idiotic way to behave!”

“I’m sorry,” said Catherine.

“You may well be,” retorted Henry furiously. “You’ve planted me as Number One suspect in a possible murder case.”

He swung back to the policeman almost with relief, man to man. “My wife, officer—and here I’ll certainly go on record; I’d like you to take this down—my wife has behaved like an imbecile. All right, I see you think you’re on to something. I’d no motive—I don’t need an odd pound from an old woman’s handbag—but I see that owing to my wife’s idiocy you’ve got grounds for suspicion. Is there any other evidence against me?”

The policeman looked shocked.

“If I may say so, sir, you’re going much too fast. We’re simply collecting information.”

“Then what else have you collected? Perhaps I can help you again,” said Henry ironically.

“Well, there was a certain amount of shouting and screaming, sir,” said the policeman delicately. “Heard by the next-door neighbors about the time you say you left. Mrs. Parkin, to be more precise, was screaming ‘Go away!’”

Henry laughed—he hoped lightly.

“Certainly Mrs. Parkin was screaming ‘Go away!’ At me, because she didn’t want to sell

me eggs. I imagine she screamed pretty freely. If her neighbors were in the least alarmed, why didn't they come rushing round?"

"They report they were going to, sir. As you say, the lady did scream out a good deal, which is why they weren't quicker, as one might put it, off the mark. But in this case they say it was more than usual; they were *going* to come round—"

"But they didn't," Henry pointed out to him.

"No, sir, because it stopped," said the policeman.

With that he thanked Mr. and Mrs. Chevron, observed that he wouldn't ask for a statement just at the moment, added that Mr. Chevron probably wouldn't be changing his address, but that if he did, Scotland Yard would appreciate notice, and courteously took his leave.

"Now," said Henry, turning to his wife Catherine, "tell me why you lied."

She sat upright against the cushions, but the color that had come back to her cheeks slowly ebbed again. It should have been a moment of respite—the policeman, so courteously withdrawing, should have left them to tears and anxious consultation, perhaps, but to a momentary respite as well.

Catherine and Henry each

suspected that they had passed simply from one crisis to another—also, that the second might prove the more disastrous. But there was nothing for it now but to go on—or so it seemed to Henry Chevron.

"Now tell me why you lied," Henry repeated. "You didn't think I was speeding—I don't, and you know it. So why did you tell that lie?"

Catherine moistened her lips. They weren't pale, because she used a very good lipstick, but the bordering flesh was too white.

"He asked what time you got in."

"I gathered that. Why did you say six? Why did you say I was here at six o'clock?"

"Because I'd told Mrs. Whyte you were."

Henry Chevron stared. The answer simply confounded him. He had to think, he had to think for several moments, before he even identified Mrs. Whyte as the woman in the next apartment. No particular friend; cooperative, Catherine always said, about taking in groceries, but otherwise negligible.

"You told Mrs. Whyte," said Henry blankly, "that I was here last night at six? When I wasn't? For heaven's sake, why?"

Catherine moistened her lips again.

"Because she heard. I mean, she must have. You know how thin these walls are. A man's voice. When I met her in the hallway just afterward, she was just coming out of her apartment, so I knew she'd been there all the time. I said you were home."

Henry walked over to the window. The movement had no purpose; it was like a prolonged jerk of the body. His mind, on the other hand, was working smoothly and efficiently; it quite surprised him to find how rapidly he grasped and explored every implication of those few brief sentences.

So this was what their years of playing fair had come to, he thought; this was what his wife's playing fair had covered. He could even correct himself: Catherine's deception couldn't be of long standing, not years old; her very foolishness, her flurry before the other woman in the corridor, proved her comparatively fresh to intrigue.

Yet in sum, this was what those years had come to.

"So when he asked me," Catherine continued painfully, "the policeman, I said the same thing again. I hadn't time to think. And even if I had—Nothing seemed to have happened last night! You didn't seem upset about anything! How could I know?"

"Nothing of that matters," Henry said.

She was silent.

In the street below the window a bus stopped and several passengers got out. Henry knew most of them by sight; they were the people who always got out of that bus at that hour, at that place. The man who always carried a bag of fruit carried his bag of fruit. The woman who always wore a red hat wore her red hat. Nothing in the world was changed—outside.

Was it necessary that everything should be changed within?

"All right," said Henry, reasonably. "You had a man here. And you could rely on my being late—it's the classic situation. Do I need to know who he is?"

Behind his back Catherine didn't move. He simply felt her looking at him.

"Don't you want to know?" she said.

"I'm not sure," said Henry reasonably. "If it's serious, of course I must. Otherwise perhaps the less I know the better—for instance, if it's anyone I do business with."

"It would be less brutal if you hit me," said Catherine.

To his annoyance she began to cry. Now that he was getting used to the idea, Henry himself

found the situation less tragic than it should have been. In fact, it wasn't tragic at all. Their playing fair with each other had become too much like play-acting, their marriage too hollow a thing altogether, to shed tears about.

Even the academic knowledge that his wife was seeing another man behind his back didn't particularly distress Henry; it seemed chiefly unlikely. He didn't feel jealous, only surprised.

He turned and looked at his wife carefully. It was a long time since he'd regarded her with such attention. Now he noted in detail the smooth blonde hair, soft skin, delicate profile. At 35 Catherine Chevron's prettiness was still girlish. She was a very pretty woman who looked far younger than her age. Even reddened with weeping, her eyes were pretty.

Henry Chevron found himself unmoved. He might have been looking at a stranger, the bestowal of whose prettiness on a man other than himself naturally didn't affect him because he felt no proprietary rights.

Evidently their marriage had been over far longer than he'd known.

It would be a relief to give up play-acting. Indeed, now that they could both give up play acting, Henry didn't see

why they shouldn't get along together without any strain at all.

"Do you want to leave me?" he asked Catherine.

To his surprise, she flinched. (What had she said about being brutal? No husband alive, Henry assured himself, could be behaving with less brutality.) However, she answered him sensibly enough.

"No. Not just for an affair. That's all it is. Of course, if you want to—"

"Not at all," said Henry, with relief. "I can't think of a greater nuisance. I've a year's hard work ahead of me, and we're perfectly comfortable."

"Thank you," said Catherine. "Don't you want me to promise anything?"

Henry reflected. The habit of playing fair wasn't yet quite dead, and he himself intended to enjoy the fullest liberty; but he answered chiefly out of indifference.

"Just don't make me look a fool. I won't come home unexpectedly, and I won't ask questions."

"It's Simon Richards," said Catherine.

The situation was no longer academic. In one instant everything was changed again. The fact that he'd been deceived, so calmly accepted (in an academic spirit) by Henry Chev-

ron, was no longer a merely academic fact. The anonymous figure of the other man had now taken on name and face.

Henry didn't have to think as long as he had before identifying Mrs. Whyte, but he still had to think a moment. It must have been at least a year earlier that he'd brought Simon Richards home for cocktails; it was fully six months since his work for Richards Hotels had ended—a commission made unexpectedly disagreeable by the manners and personality of their proprietor.

Unlike most big men, Simon Richards was a bully, a loud-mouthed believer in keeping his employees on their toes, up to the mark, in fear and trembling. He couldn't bully Henry Chevron, Henry being as much at the top of his own tree as Simon Richards was at the top of his. But Simon Richards bullied everyone else Henry had seen him in contact with; working for him had been like working for a slaver.

He hadn't been able to bully Henry Chevron, but now he'd taken away Henry's wife.

"That oaf!" shouted Henry. He was trembling with rage, choking with disgust; if he'd moved one step toward his wife he would have struck her.

"I know you never liked him," Catherine said.

Insanely, since it was the worst thing he could do if he wished to keep his control, Henry allowed his thoughts to dwell on Simon Richards' person. Women of naturally coarse taste no doubt found him attractive; he stood six foot three in his socks, and his great powerful head, blue-jowled, was thatched with curly black hair.

Henry Chevron looked suddenly at his wife's hands. Catherine had pretty hands, small and slender. The thought of her running them through those tight black curls nauseated him.

"Your taste is coarser than I realized," said Henry. "Or did he give you diamonds? Have you anything valuable cached away?"

"He never gave me anything," said Catherine. "He was lonely, and I was sorry for him."

"Don't strain my credulity too far," said Henry. "Not even a garnet?" he mocked. "Just tears of loneliness on those pretty little hands?"

"I have tried to keep them nice," said Catherine. The irrelevance of women! "I didn't think you noticed."

"And you still don't want to leave me?" mocked Henry. "He's not married, is he?"

"I've told you," said Catherine, "that it's just an affair.

But he is fond of me in his way, and I've grown fond of him. You said you wouldn't ask any questions."

"And I won't," agreed Henry.

At last he moved, violently—but not toward his wife, toward the bedroom.

"I'm leaving you," he said.

Where now was his placid acceptance of a not uncommon, indeed a classic, situation? He plunged into the bedroom, pulled a suitcase from the top shelf of the closet, and began thrusting in shirts.

"See him here as often as you like," he called, "but it won't be under my roof! Call him up now to say the coast's clear! I'm leaving!"

Catherine came running to the door. It gratified him to see that she looked frightened. "But you can't, you mustn't!" cried Catherine.

"Why not?" demanded Henry. As she laid a hand on the suitcase, he struck it roughly away. "Why not? What's to stop me?"

"Scotland Yard," said Catherine.

It was almost incredible. For the preceding half hour Henry had completely forgotten Scotland Yard. He'd completely forgotten his status as Number One suspect in a potential murder case.

Catherine sat down on one of the beds. She still looked frightened, but she was evidently making a strong effort to keep fear out of her voice—to speak, now that her warning had got through to him, calmly and reasonably. Her voice scarcely shook at all, only her hands.

"That policeman practically warned you, Henry, not to go away anywhere. Asking you to tell Scotland Yard first was probably just formula. Besides, what could look worse? I still don't see how they can possibly suspect you, you had no motive. But if you rush away now, what could look worse?"

Henry sat down opposite her. He and Catherine had slept in twin beds for four or five years now—the refurnishing of the bedroom, some four or five years earlier, neatly covering their indifference to each other. He knew that what Catherine said made sense; it also offered him a weapon to wound her with.

"I imagine they wouldn't be suspecting me at all," said Henry Chevron, "if that unsophisticated cop hadn't taken you for a faithful wife. Don't faithful wives notoriously alibi their husbands?"

Catherine nodded at once. She didn't cry again; she was thinking. Henry unexpectedly

found himself recognizing her attitude—chin on palms, her fingers pushed up into her hair. It had once been a joke between them that he could always tell when she'd been thinking because it made her hair untidy.

Well, now she had something to think about, he told himself bitterly.

"Then perhaps it would be best if you did go," said Catherine at last. "But tell Scotland Yard first, Henry, to explain why you—why you can't spend another night under the same roof with me. Wouldn't that show them I haven't been trying to alibi you, only myself?"

There was sense in that, too. In a way, as Catherine said, it might be the best thing to do.

"And they can take a statement," Catherine went on, "or whatever it is, from Simon. To prove that you weren't here and he was, and that would explain everything again."

"You think he would cooperate?" asked Henry sardonically.

"He'd have to," said Catherine simply. "They'd send that policeman; and I'd go with him."

Examining the implications of this, Henry was astonished to find himself uneasy.

"Wouldn't that pretty well

finish everything? Between you and Richards?"

"I suppose it would," said Catherine. "I'm still certain, Henry, we've found the right thing to do."

It was obviously the right thing to do. Catherine's plan was obviously and eminently sensible. What astonished Henry Chevron now was his own reluctance to adopt it.

He found he didn't want to take the tale of his wife's deception to Scotland Yard, for no other reason than that she was his wife. The dragging in of Simon Richards, distasteful in itself, was doubly distasteful because it would expose Catherine as such a pathetic fool.

What a fool she had been! Possibly he, Henry Chevron, was a fool, too, but the instinct to protect his wife persisted.

"I'll stay here, at any rate, for tonight," said Henry. "Don't argue."

Catherine opened her mouth to speak, closed it, then opened it again.

"You've had no dinner," she said. "You must be hungry."

He was hungry. He hadn't until that moment realized it, but he was famished. It was only half-past seven, but the emotions of the last hour had been punishing.

They ate upstairs in the

kitchenette; neither of them could face the restaurant. Catherine had been crying too much; Henry was too tired. There were also a dozen fresh eggs, more than enough to make omelets for both of them.

Catherine went about the business of mixing them with great seriousness. She had a little bottle of dried herbs that Henry remembered. It could hardly be the same bottle, but it was the same sort—the sort his tooth powder came in—that Catherine, in the early years of their marriage, had always seized upon as soon as empty to scald out and refill with herbs or peppercorns or ground almonds. It was a very familiar bottle.

Henry sat down to watch his wife cook for him. He would probably leave in the morning, but in the meantime he sat and watched her.

How did it happen, he wanted to ask—out of purely intellectual curiosity. How did it happen that for the last five years we've had nothing to say to each other? I know I've been busy, but how the deuce did it happen?

He naturally didn't utter the words aloud, since he was probably leaving in the morning; but as they crossed his mind, it disconcerted him to see Catherine suspend the beating

of her omelet. It appeared that she could still read his thoughts, just like a wife.

"It's not your fault," said Catherine. "I don't even know that it was mine. It just happened when you got so busy. The butter is in the refrigerator. Will you take it out?"

They ate in silence. When they'd finished, Henry automatically turned on the radio: a sugary version of *The Blue Danube* flowed lusciously forth.

Catherine listened a moment, then switched it off. "I don't want to cry any more," she said reasonably.

"I'll help you with the dishes," Henry said.

"If you won't go to Scotland Yard in the morning, I shall," said Catherine. "No, thank you, Henry, I'd rather do them by myself."

How could the night pass except uneasily? Henry made up a bed on the living-room sofa. Catherine brought in blankets for him. Physically he was comfortable enough, but he couldn't sleep. He lay and worried about Catherine, his wife.

For he couldn't see what was to become of her. She herself was evidently under no illusion as to the consequences of what she meant to do. Simon Richards wouldn't forgive the

publication of their affair—and to the police!—any more than he, Henry, had forgiven her betrayal of her marriage vows.

Out of loyalty to a husband already lost, Catherine was about to lose her lover as well. And she wasn't a woman able to stand alone; her need of masculine support was Victorian—also one of the reasons why Henry Chevron had loved and married her.

About midnight it struck him that Catherine, too, was probably lying awake, as much in need of comfort as himself.

About one in the morning he acknowledged that it wasn't because he might be arrested that he, Henry Chevron, needed comfort, but because his marriage to Catherine, for whom he still needed to take thought, had finally come to an end. For all his success in his chosen profession, he still needed someone to take thought for, someone who depended on him. Like Catherine, he couldn't stand alone. Their needs were different but complementary.

At about two Henry got up and went quietly to the bedroom door and quietly opened it. He wasn't, he assured himself, seeking comfort in his own distress; he simply wanted to see if Catherine, awake, required comfort from him.

He opened the door as quietly as possible, so that if she was sleeping he wouldn't wake her. But his precautions turned out to be unnecessary; there Catherine stood, just on the other side of the door.

"Can't you sleep either, my darling?"

Which one of them spoke?

About the case of old Mrs. Parkin, beaten and robbed, little more was ever reported. On regaining her wits she cleared Henry Chevron almost casually—it was after a man came wanting to buy eggs, related Mrs. Parkin, that she'd been annoyed again by a man who wanted to sell her a broom. They were such wonderfully cheap brooms, however, that in the end she had decided to take one—and remembered no more after opening her handbag, which had contained four pounds, nine shillings, and a penny.

It was "their" policeman who brought the Chevrons this good news, while they still sat at breakfast the following morning. They pressed coffee on him and the last of the fresh eggs; he thanked them but refused with his usual kind authority.

He was, in fact, quite unprofessionally happy to relieve so united a couple from

anxiety. The atmosphere in the Chevron kitchen reminded him of his own cozy breakfasts at home. He didn't in his heart blame Mrs. Chevron at all for lying to him. He was convinced that she had seen the paragraph in the newspaper, but he didn't blame her at all for the unnecessary lie she'd told to alibi her husband.

The truth was of course more complex. Catherine had lied to alibi herself. Yet out of this imbroglio—the passing danger to Henry bringing to light the constant threat to their marriage—had come the rediscovery of themselves as husband and wife.

Henry had, in truth, been driving home.



## Jane Speed

### Sounds in the Night

*Jane Speed's novelet, "Sounds in the Night," is not a story of the fast, grating, slabbang school. It is a story that takes its own time to unfold, that cannot be rushed; it chooses its own inherent and appropriate speed, growing, growing—warmly human, sympathetically understanding, probing with the gentle touch of a highly skilled surgeon . . .*

*Now meet Andrew MacEwan, 76, and fighting his advancing years—and what a gallant fight! In the middle of one night he hears sounds—and no one believes him; but those footsteps on the roof became symbolic of the footsteps in his own life, the footsteps we all must hear above us sooner or later, whether we listen for them or not; and old Mr. MacEwan would not deny having heard them, no matter what anyone said. He was a man who faced up to "the indignities that seemed to be an inevitable accompaniment to getting older" . . .*

The soot-darkened apartment houses that line most of the streets in Manhattan's upper West Side exude a uniform mellow shabbiness. They differ from one another chiefly in whatever vestiges remain in them of past strivings for gentility: here a lobby ceiling embellished with meaningless intricate flourishes of raised plaster, there a network of iron scrolls, backing finger-smeared glass doors, and on some a name—The Atlantic,

The Shalimar, The Alhambra—as incongruously exotic as the Cadiz and Lima and Athens that turn out to be homey towns in Ohio.

In one of these buildings, whose particular distinction was a garland of chipped cement roses entwined over the front entrance, the tenants with bedroom windows opening onto the courtyard were startled out of their sleep by a sudden sound a little after three o'clock on a morning in early May.

They remained suspended for a few minutes in a state of puzzled, resentful semi-wakefulness. Then, since whatever it was that had roused them was not repeated, they turned over and resumed their slumbers.

In Apartment 6A, Andrew MacEwan was about to do the same when a second sound caught his dwindling attention. It was not loud, but it was so familiar that he recognized it at once; someone was walking on the roof just above him.

Living on the top floor as he did, Mr. MacEwan heard this sound almost every day now that the weather was getting warm—the firm, busy tread of a woman hanging out her wash, the heavier one of a repairman servicing a television antenna, and just late yesterday the footsteps of Mr. Radovic, the building superintendent, up there with his bucket of tar patching the roof.

Mr. MacEwan shifted so that his eye fell on the luminous dial of his clock, and the incompatibility of the sound and the hour finally penetrated his sleep-fogged mind. What, he wondered hazily, could anyone possibly find to do up there at this time of night? But by now the footsteps had stopped and drowsiness was pulling hard at him. So, with the unanswered question still dangling uneasily

on the fringes of his consciousness, he too slipped back into sleep . . .

At the first jarring ring Mr. MacEwan's right hand groped its way to the clock, turned off the alarm, and fumbled hastily back to the shelter of the blankets. Then his left hand reached over, quite as instinctively, to Bessie's side of the bed, and as usual it was the sharp recoil of surprise at finding her place empty that jolted him wide-awake.

He lay staring at the ceiling till the familiar thudding sense of loss subsided, then he sighed the smallest of sighs. It seemed he was doomed to make this discovery anew every morning; a habit of nearly half a century could hardly be expected to loosen its grip in a few short years. But by now at least, he knew better than to dwell on these bad moments. He eased into a sitting position and sensibly addressed himself to the task of getting out of bed.

There was a certain amount of suspense connected with this humble operation. Would the stiffness in his right knee, for example, have become overnight a permanent part of his repertoire of accumulated infirmities? Or would he be able to limber it up into yet one more day's worth of useful service?

It was not until he had struggled into the new maroon flannel bathrobe and stood with his feet encased in a pair of old felt scuffs that he finally permitted himself a smile of cautious optimism. He glanced in fond apology at the handsome leather slippers sitting pristinely in a corner. They and the robe had been a 76th birthday gift from his daughter, Elizabeth, and one of these days he really was going to break in the slippers; but not first thing in the morning, and not this morning.

The *first* thing for Andrew MacEwan, this morning as every morning, was to walk into his living room, sit down in his favorite chair, and quietly revel in the only glory of his apartment—a window that looked west across the Hudson River. The early rays of the sun, catching the green of the trees that grew thick as moss on the face of the Palisades and glinting off a window here and there along the New Jersey shore, seemed to him a fine and hopeful sight with which to start the day. Nothing could quite spoil his enjoyment of it, not even the unending hum of cars from the West Side Highway, all too unedifyingly visible far below him.

It was true that in the 40 years since he and Bessie and

little Elizabeth first moved here, the view had been grievously encroached upon by newer, taller buildings that had sprung up on the side of the street nearer the river. Yes, even that timeworn source of mingled outrage and pride, the George Washington Bridge, was lost to his sight now. But as the scope of his view had been whittled down, there had seemed to grow in him a compensatingly heightened awareness and appreciation of what was left for him to see.

In much the same way it pleased him to reflect, as he walked back to the bathroom and laid out his shaving things, that advancing age had also encroached on his life, slowing his pace, curtailing his activities, narrowing down the possibilities. Surely then, he argued into the mirror, it was only natural that he should treasure all the more what was left—like these four admittedly undistinguished but reassuringly familiar rooms—with, he added tartly, the view from *his* side of the river.

Oh, he recognized and was duly grateful for the loving concern that prompted Elizabeth's efforts to persuade him to come and live with her and Harry and the grandchildren in West Englewood. But to Mr. MacEwan the prospect of spending the rest of his days on

the other side of the river—and out of sight of the river at that—smacked of dreary exile. He put a new blade into his razor and lathered his face, more firmly resolved than ever to resist such a move with all the cunning at his command.

It was largely to this end that he arose at six on the dot every morning. He was still quite able to shave and dress himself thank you; it just took a little longer now. And the basic stratagem in his private campaign to hold the fort on the beloved status quo was to present a serenely neat and affable exterior to Mrs. Bassett when she arrived at eight.

Elizabeth's "agent"—that was the way he thought of Mrs. Bassett. Ostensibly she came in every weekday to clean the apartment, do the laundry, give him his midday meal, and prepare a cold supper for him to eat later. These diversionary tactics did not deceive him for a moment. He knew perfectly well that her chief function was to keep an eye on him. Let him show the slightest sign of failing health or inability to cope, and Mrs. Bassett would be in touch with Headquarters like *that*.

He carefully finished off the last few strokes, rinsed his face, patted it dry, then leaned close to the mirror and inspected the results.

Mr. MacEwan spurned not only the "greasy kid stuff" but all other stuff as well, so his wispy white hair tended to stand out from his head in raffish disarray, enhancing the look of comic frailty that had settled down on him in his later years. When he had first reluctantly faced up to this effect it had rather disconcerted him, particularly when it gave rise to comments like the one of that wretched girl at the bus stop who had referred to him as "that sweet old man."

In time, however, he had grown accustomed to this as to all the indignities that seemed to be an inevitable accompaniment to getting older. And in recent years he had begun to look upon his appearance as a positive asset—a kind of disguise, actually. Let Elizabeth and Mrs. Bassett—and indeed the world at large—dismiss him as no longer capable of offering either serious assistance or threat. All the better for his little plan that they should not suspect what manner of man they really had to deal with.

He gave his reflection a conspiratorial wink and went jauntily back to the bedroom.

By 7:15 he was in the kitchen, spruce and chipper in the armor of immaculate shirt and trousers, and ready for another day of matching wits

with The Woman from D.A.U.G.H.T.E.R.

As he turned on the fire under the teakettle, Mr. MacEwan heard the sounds of some kind of hubbub down in the courtyard; mildly curious, he raised the kitchen window a little higher and stuck his head out to see what was going on.

Mr. Radovic and Jose, the porter, and a couple of other people were standing in a huddle around someone kneeling near the center of the courtyard. But what started the first pricking of apprehension up Mr. MacEwan's spine was the arrival of several uniformed policemen who came out of the basement door and hurried over to the group.

The kneeling man rose to speak to them and Mr. MacEwan realized it was David Kleinman (Sadie's son, the doctor) who was interning at nearby Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. Then David stepped back, gesturing upward, and Mr. MacEwan saw at last what the excitement was all about.

A woman was lying on the cement yard. He couldn't make out who she was but, as he watched, the word "suicide" ran through the group like a shudder and echoed ominously up the court.

There swept over Mr. MacEwan a sudden hot sense of the

impropriety of his leaning out the window gawking like that, and he pulled his head hastily inside.

With trembling hands he began to potter about the kitchen in mindless agitation. It seemed imperative that he do something, but he couldn't for the life of him think what. He made himself a cup of tea and sat down at the table, but it grew cold in front of him as he tried in vain to imagine which of his neighbors could have been driven to this sad extreme.

He was actually grateful when eight o'clock finally arrived and he heard Mrs. Bassett's key in the lock. For one thing, the redoubtable Mrs. Bassett could be absolutely relied on to furnish him with all the details of the tragic business in the courtyard; she had an uncanny ability to elicit strands of gossip seemingly out of the air. But right now, more pressing even than his natural anxiety to know exactly what had happened and to whom, Mr. MacEwan felt a deep and urgent need just to talk to another human being.

"Oh, Mr. MacEwan," gasped Mrs. Bassett the moment she'd got her ample self inside the door. "Have you heard what happened?"

"I saw a little from the window. It was—suicide?"

"Oh, yes." She unpinned her hat and placed it with her purse carefully on a shelf in the hall closet. "No doubt about that—no doubt at all."

"Who—" Mr. MacEwan was almost afraid to ask. "Who was it?"

"Well, you'll never believe it." She shook her head slowly as though she still couldn't quite believe it herself. "Little Mrs. Kummer next door."

"Oh, no!"

Mr. MacEwan's and the Kummers' were corner apartments, the only two on the floor that opened onto the stair landing, which set them a little apart from their other neighbors and lent their occupants a spurious proximity. But it was not mere proximity that had caused Mr. MacEwan to overlook Celeste Kummer in his gloomy speculations.

She had always seemed such a light-hearted little woman, happily and totally wrapped up in the fascinating business of self-adornment, with never a problem that couldn't be solved by a new dress, a new trinket, a new hairdo; and blessed, moreover, with a husband whose single-minded joy in life was to see to it that she lacked for nothing. For all the fifteen years they'd lived next door, Stanley Kummer had, quite cheerfully, come home from his

daytime job, grabbed a few hours of sleep, then spent a good part of the night delivering bundles of a morning newspaper around the city.

"You're right," Mr. MacEwan said at last rather shakily. "I can't believe it."

"It's true though," Mrs. Bassett stated grimly, tying on her apron as she marched out to the kitchen, Mr. MacEwan following sadly behind. She came to an abrupt stop when she saw the cup and saucer still sitting on the table.

"Oh, now, Mr. MacEwan! Is that all you had for breakfast? And it doesn't look like you even touched that."

"There was so much excitement—" he explained distractedly.

"Well, you ought to have something. Life has to go on, you know." She poured the cold tea into the sink. "I'll make you a fresh cup and a nice poached egg to go with it."

Mr. MacEwan sat down meekly at the kitchen table and watched her move briskly between sink and stove with a determined back-to-normal clatter.

"I think I'll make me a pot of coffee while I'm at it," she went on. "This thing's upset me so."

"Does Stanley know yet?" Mr. MacEwan asked.

"Yes." She sighed as she clapped a lid over the egg in the pan and began to measure coffee into the percolator. "He was just coming in from work—that night job of his—and Mr. Radovic had to tell him. I must say he took it pretty well—didn't go to pieces or anything like that. Just looked kind of dazed. Of course I don't know how he'll be when it **really** hits him. I was so glad David was there. Such a nice level-headed young man. He brought Mr. Kummer straight up to his apartment. I rode up in the elevator with them. It was kind of awkward—a person just doesn't know what to say. One of the policemen and some detective fellow came along. Wanted to ask some questions and look around. Seems a shame to bother the poor man at a time like this but—well, I guess they have to do their job."

She turned down the fire under the perking coffee, slid the finished egg smoothly onto a piece of toast, and set it in front of Mr. MacEwan. Then she looked up as they heard several pairs of footsteps going up the stairs off the landing outside.

Mrs. Bassett nodded toward the sound. "That must be Mr. Radovic taking them up to the roof." She lowered her voice solemnly. "That's where they

think she jumped from, you know. The Kummers don't have any window facing the court."

"Why, Mrs. Bassett!" The recollection took Mr. MacEwan by surprise. "That must be what woke me last night—early this morning really—about three o'clock."

"Ah-h—you heard it, too, then. Quite a few people down in the lobby were saying that something woke them just about that time. Of course, they never dreamed it was anything like this. But that's what it must have been all right. Well, a person falling from that distance would make quite a sound—even a little bit of a thing like Mrs. Kummer."

Mrs. Bassett bit her lip and sniffed a little as she turned out the fire and poured herself a cup of coffee. "Oh," she murmured, "it's just *too* awful to think about."

"But, Mrs. Bassett." Mr. MacEwan was quite excited now. "I heard somebody walking up there last night."

Mrs. Bassett uttered a little gasp and nearly spilled her coffee as she sat down opposite him. "You mean you actually heard that poor soul! Oh, Mr. MacEwan, to think you might have—but, of course, you didn't know who it was or what she was planning to do. Well, how could you?"

"No... no." Mr. MacEwan brushed aside her words impatiently. "I mean afterwards. It must have been the sound of her falling that woke me. And it was *after* that I heard the footsteps."

"After?" She looked at him rather blankly. "Well, I don't see how that could be. You must be mistaken."

"No," he maintained stubbornly, "I'm not mistaken. I did hear someone—*after*."

Mrs. Bassett shifted in her chair, and Mr. MacEwan knew even before she opened her mouth that he was about to be "reasoned with."

"Mr. MacEwan dear," she began kindly, "if there had been anyone else on the roof last night—though what anyone would be doing wandering around up there at that time of night I cannot imagine—but if there had been, then they would've tried to stop the woman, wouldn't they? And if they couldn't manage that, then they'd certainly have come down and wakened Mr. Radovic or called the police or something. You're not going to try to tell me anyone could see a thing like that and just come back down and calmly go to bed as though nothing had happened."

"No." Then, half thinking aloud, he added, "Unless—"

"Unless what?" Mrs. Bassett caught him up sharply.

"Well, suppose," he suggested carefully, "suppose Mrs. Kummer *didn't* jump. Suppose—someone pushed her. A person who had done that would take good care not to raise any alarm."

Mrs. Bassett took a deep breath and folded her arms across the shelf of her bosom. "For shame, Mr. MacEwan," she said severely. "I just don't know where a nice old gentleman like you gets such awful notions." Then, with a long-suffering sigh, she amended, "Oh, yes I do though. It's those trashy detective stories you're always reading."

"I do not read trashy ones." She dismissed this distinction with a wave of her hand. "Just tell me this, Mr. Hawkshaw MacEwan: exactly who do you think might have done such a thing?"

"Well, I don't know that, of course, but—"

"Of course you don't," she cut him off triumphantly. "Because there *isn't* any such a person. Why you could ask for blocks around and you wouldn't find a soul to say a word against Mrs. Kummer. She may not have done a whole lot of good in her life, but she certainly never did anyone any harm, now did she?"

"Not that I know of," he had to admit.

"Oh, Mr. MacEwan dear." Mrs. Bassett switched abruptly to an appeal to his better nature. "Isn't this a sad enough business as it is without your trying to make it into something worse?"

"I'm not trying to *make* it into anything," he protested. "I'm just trying to understand. Anyhow—" He paused for a moment thoughtfully. "Would it really be worse?" Then, as he caught the shocked look on Mrs. Bassett's face, he added, "For Stanley, I mean. Nothing can bring her back, of course. But—well, suicide is so especially cruel, such a slap in the face. As though all his years of loving effort to make her happy hadn't meant anything at all."

Mrs. Bassett pushed her chair back and stood up, firmly dissociating herself from any complicated, depressing nonsense of this sort. "Well, I'd just keep this in mind if I was you. This building is full of policemen and detectives and goodness knows what all. They know what they're about and I'm sure that if there's anything out of the way, they'll find it. You understand what I'm getting at, Mr. MacEwan?"

"Oh, I think I do, Mrs. Bassett," he replied amiably. "It is your opinion that there

will be no need for me to step into the case."

"All right, all right." She threw up her hands. "Have your little joke if you must. But I'm serious about this. You go around telling people about something you *think* you heard—wakened up out of a sound sleep in the middle of the night"—she stressed the words dryly—"and you know what's going to happen? Oh, there's a few—there always are—who'll snatch at any bit of gossip and start up the biggest, ugliest rumors possible, which isn't going to make poor Mr. Kummer's load any easier to bear. But most people, Mr. MacEwan, most people will say—".

"Poor old Andy MacEwan, he's really lost his marbles at last."

"Well, people *can* be pretty nasty, don't forget it. And I'm sure," she added, cracking the whip ever so slightly, "your daughter wouldn't like it a bit if she knew you were going around making a fool of yourself."

"I shall certainly try," he assured her, "not to make a fool of myself."

"I just hope you mean that," she sighed, not altogether satisfied. Then she perked up as they heard footsteps on the stairs outside again.

"Oh, they're coming back down. I want to catch Mr. Radovic if I can."

She hustled to the door and opened it, and from where he sat, Mr. MacEwan caught a glimpse of several policemen moving into the apartment next door. Then, after a brief exchange, Mrs. Bassett led her unwilling prize back into the kitchen.

"Morning, Mr. MacEwan." Mr. Radovic stood there, rocking back and forth on his heels uneasily.

"Good morning, Mr. Radovic. You've had a pretty full day already, haven't you?"

"Oh, Lord!" Mr. Radovic groaned and rolled his eyes.

"Why don't you sit down and have a cup of coffee?" Mrs. Bassett urged.

"Well, thanks just the same, Mrs. Bassett, but my wife's got breakfast waiting for me downstairs. I was just sitting down to it when Jose started banging on the door. He was the one who found her, you know. He was so upset we could hardly get any sense out of him. When he gets excited he forgets his English."

Mrs. Bassett observed the amenities with a sympathetic nod, then pressed quickly on to the matter uppermost in her mind. "Tell me, did the police find anything up on the roof?"

"Oh, yeah." Mr. Radovic relaxed a little and grew almost expansive now that it seemed clear he wasn't going to be bothered by a request for repairs on top of all his other headaches. "They found the place where it looks like she went over. One of the tiles along the top of the wall on the court side is pulled loose. I knew for a fact it wasn't loose yesterday afternoon. I was up there patching the roof and I took a look around."

"Poor soul," Mrs. Bassett sighed. "What do you suppose ever got into her?"

"Beats me. She sure was the last person you'd think would do a thing like that, you know what I mean?"

"Oh, I do indeed. Why, Mr. MacEwan and I were just saying—" She broke off abruptly as she recalled what she and Mr. MacEwan *had* just been talking about and finished instead with a serviceable generality. "Well, I guess you just never know." She cast her eyes appropriately downward, then uttered a sharp, irritated gasp. "Oh, for land's sake! What's happened to my clean floor? Mr. Radovic, what've you got on the bottom of your shoes?"

"Wha-what?" He nervously lifted his foot and inspected the sole of one shoe. "Oh, geez, I'm

sorry, Mrs. Bassett. It's from the roof. That tar must not be quite dry yet." He looked at her in such abject apology that Mrs. Bassett had no choice but to relent a little.

"Oh, never mind," she said. "You didn't do it on purpose, after all. But you'd better clean those shoes off before you go tracking it around. That tar's mean stuff to get up, you know."

"Oh, I know, I know," he agreed eagerly and moved to the door on a kind of exaggerated tiptoe.

Mrs. Bassett followed him and as he gratefully made his escape, Mr. MacEwan saw David Kleinman come out of the Kummer apartment next door. He smiled and made himself a small private bet that Mrs. Bassett was about to snare her next source of information.

Right on cue, Mrs. Bassett uttered a glad cry. "David! Now, *you* have time for a cup of coffee, don't you?"

"Well," David hesitated, running his hand through his wrinkled-looking hair. "I won't say I couldn't use it. But it'll have to be a quick one," he added as he followed Mrs. Bassett into the apartment. "I didn't even get to shave before Mr. Radovic routed me out."

On the threshold of the kitchen she stopped him sud-

denly and asked, "You haven't been up on the roof, have you?"

"No." David looked puzzled. "I've been next door with Mr. Kummer. Why?"

"That's why." She pointed dramatically downward. "Mr. Radovic just tracked tar from the roof onto my nice clean floor."

"Oh, that's too bad." David sat down and grinned companionably at Mr. MacEwan as Mrs. Bassett whisked out a cup and saucer and poured the steaming coffee.

A strong rapport existed between this pleasant-faced, tired-eyed young man and the old one, each being peculiarly well situated to appreciate the other's predicament. Mr. MacEwan, for his part, never ceased to admire the patience and grace with which David steadfastly maintained his sovereignty of spirit in the face of the endless, loving onslaughts of his widowed mother.

Mrs. Bassett had got out a pail of water, scrub brush, and putty knife and was on her knees working away at the blemishes on "her" kitchen floor.

"You just go right ahead with your coffee," she said. "I want to get this stuff up before it dries on. Tell me," she asked, never pausing in her scraping

and scrubbing, "how is Mr. Kummer?"

"Oh . . ." David stirred his coffee thoughtfully. "Not good, not bad. Just sits there not saying much. After the police finished talking to him I tried to get him to lie down. He's had no sleep, you know—he worked yesterday and most of the night, too. But he said no, he didn't feel tired, and no, he didn't want to take anything. I asked him if he wanted me to call his own doctor but he didn't want that either."

David shrugged. "I didn't seem to be doing much good, so I finally left. Anyhow, I have to be over at the hospital by ten. I don't know though, I don't feel too easy about leaving him that way. I suppose the police will be in and out for a while yet. But after that—" David frowned. "Has he got any relatives, do you know?"

Mrs. Bassett looked up for a minute. "Just that brother of his. What's his name? Carl, isn't it?"

Mr. MacEwan nodded.

"Don't know how much help he'd be, though," she went on. "He just turns up now and then—mostly when he needs money, I'd guess. I have the impression he's kind of a drifter—never does seem to get settled in any one job. Anyways, I haven't seen him

around for quite a while."

"Oh, I did." Mr. MacEwan suddenly remembered. "Just yesterday."

"Why—" Mrs. Bassett's mouth dropped open in innocent astonishment that anyone could have escaped her eagle eye. "I never saw him."

"It was after you'd left for the day," Mr. MacEwan quickly assured her. "A little after five o'clock. I met him in the lobby as I was going out for a walk. He was looking very fit and prosperous, as a matter of fact. Had a wonderful tan. Said he just got in from Florida."

Mrs. Bassett sniffed. "How come he isn't here then?" She was clearly put out with Carl for having sneaked in behind her back, so to speak. "I thought he always stayed with them when he was in town. Though maybe," she took a final dig at him, "if he's doing as well as you say, he finally got a place of his own. And high time."

"There isn't anyone else?" David asked.

"Not so far as I know," Mrs. Bassett replied. "Mr. Kummer told me once they lost their folks when they were both quite young. The boys were raised by an aunt. But she passed away, too—oh, just a little more'n a month ago, wasn't it? I remember Mr.

Kummer took off from work and they went to the funeral. Besides, she wouldn't have been any help. She was an invalid—spent her last years in a private nursing home upstate somewhere. Quite a nice place, Mr. Kummer said, and it wasn't any burden on them because she had money of her own. In fact, I think the Kummers had some expectations from that quarters."

She paused to think that over for a minute. "Now, that's another funny thing, isn't it? I mean, Mrs. Kummer doing away with herself just when they had prospects of some real money coming in. Far be it from me to speak ill of the dead, but there's no getting around it, that little lady did love to spend money. Well," she shook her head and resumed her scrubbing, "I guess it's one of those things we never will understand."

For several minutes Mr. MacEwan had been speculatively eyeing the door which Mrs. Bassett had left ajar when she and David came in. Now, with Mrs. Bassett safely bent over her work and David earnestly discussing with her what could be done about Mr. Kummer, Mr. MacEwan slipped out of his chair and went quietly into the hall and out the door.

A young patrolman had just

come out of the Kummers' apartment. He was not, Mr. MacEwan realized regretfully, anyone really in charge, but he was the nearest thing to authority within easy reach.

"Officer," Mr. MacEwan began, and his voice trembled infuriatingly with the need to say what he had to say before Mrs. Bassett got on his trail. "I must tell you this. About three o'clock this morning I was wakened by a sound—I think now it was Mrs. Kummer falling."

"Oh, yes, sir," said the young man brightly. "Several people have reported that." Then, as though not wanting to offend Mr. MacEwan he added generously, "I'll take your name, of course, sir. It's always good to have corroboration." And he brought out a new-looking notebook and wasted precious minutes painstakingly getting Mr. MacEwan's name spelled right.

"But what I wanted to tell you," Mr. MacEwan pressed on anxiously, "is that after I was wakened—*after* she fell—I heard someone walking on the roof."

"After, sir?" The young man looked politely skeptical. "You're sure it was after?"

"Yes." Mr. MacEwan had to strain to keep his voice patiently controlled. "Yes, I'm certain it was after."

They stood looking at each other across the abyss of years and Mr. MacEwan didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the picture of himself he saw reflected in the young man's expression: a little old man, probably hard of hearing, given to who-knows-what senile imaginings and, above all, burning, in the wake of a tragedy, with the universal human fever to play the Important Witness.

And just then, as though to crown the antic hopelessness of the situation, he heard Mrs. Bassett's voice behind him.

"Mr. MacEwan," she said sternly. "What *are* you up to?"

It was quite useless to protest and he let himself be led ignominiously back to the kitchen, preferring not to see the knowing look that must have passed between Mrs. Bassett and the patrolman.

Mrs. Bassett, her floor now restored to its former spotlessness, plumped herself down on a chair between him and David. "Honestly, Mr. MacEwan," she fumed. "Can't I let you out of my sight for a minute? I thought it was understood you weren't going to spread that story around."

"I wasn't spreading it around," Mr. MacEwan rallied gamely. "I was just"—then the recollection of that fruitless

exchange doused his little flare of spirit, and he finished, barely above a whisper—"reporting it to the authorities."

"What's this all about?" David looked from one to the other in bewilderment.

"Oh-h, I guess it's all right to tell *you*," Mrs. Bassett grumbled, and she proceeded to give David her own highly deprecating version of those sounds in the night. "So he's got this bee in his bonnet," she wound up, "that maybe somebody *murdered* Mrs. Kummer. Now I ask you, did you ever hear of anything so foolish?"

With practiced ease David managed to remain both respectful and quite deaf to her invitation to scorn. He kept his glance trained sympathetically on Mr. MacEwan for a moment. Then, gently, he asked (*et tu, David?*), "Are you sure it was after, Mr. MacEwan?"

"Yes, David. I'm sure it was after."

David stared down at the table in troubled silence. "Well. The thing is," he said at last, avoiding Mr. MacEwan's eye as he reluctantly spoke the traitorous words, "they found a note. On her dressing table."

"A suicide note?" Mrs. Bassett gasped.

David shrugged unhappily. "I don't know how else you could take it."

"Oh, David, what did it say?" Mrs. Bassett could barely contain herself.

"I'm not sure I'm supposed to—" David hesitated, then weakened. "Well, they didn't say *not* to. It was nothing personal or anything like that. It just said, 'Dear Stanley, I hope some day you'll be able to forgive me for what I'm going to do.'"

When it became apparent that he wasn't going to go on, Mrs. Bassett asked, "Well, didn't she say *why*?"

"No. That's all there was. No signature or anything. But they had Mr. Kummer get out some of her handwriting, and I suppose they'll have some expert compare them. But they looked like the same writing to me—kind of fancy, you know? A lot of little swirls and things."

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Bassett nodded sagely. "I've seen it many a time on notes she put on the door for deliverymen. She wrote a very elegant hand, Mrs. Kummer did." Then, with a sad dignity befitting this sobering but satisfying confirmation of her views, she said, "Well now, Mr. MacEwan. What do you have to say to *that*?"

Mr. MacEwan was spared the necessity of replying when David chose this moment to look at his watch.

"Nine-thirty already! I've got to go," he said as he rose noisily from the table. "Thank you for the coffee, Mrs. Bassett." He gripped Mr. MacEwan's hand briefly in mute apology and went to the door where he paused a moment. "Look," he said, "could you maybe stop in after a while and just see how Mr. Kummer is getting along?"

"Why, of course, David," Mrs. Bassett agreed quickly.

"I'd feel better. Maybe you can find out how to get in touch with his brother—just so he isn't left all by himself."

"Don't you worry now. I'll see to it." Then as he ducked out the door, she called after him, "My regards to your mother."

Mrs. Bassett rose and carried the dishes over to the sink. "Such a nice boy," she went on warmly. "Though how he stays so thin with all that rich food Sadie's always stuffing into him—probably has indigestion half the time. What I always say is, there's nothing beats good plain cooking."

Her voice rattled on in accompaniment to the clatter of the dishwashing and Mr. MacEwan, who'd heard her grind this ax too many times before, got up and started out of the kitchen.

"Mr. MacEwan, you know

what I think I'll do," she said suddenly, stopping him at the door. "I think I'll see if Mr. Kummer won't come over here for a while. Maybe I can persuade him to have a bit of lunch with us. That is, if it's all right with you?"

"Perfectly all right, Mrs. Bassett. Though he may not feel much like eating."

"Well, he's more likely to eat a little something with us than all by himself. And, believe me, there's no trouble so bad it doesn't seem worse on an empty stomach." Fired with zeal, she popped the last dish in the drainer, dried her hands, and took off her apron. "I'm going over right now. I shouldn't be long."

As soon as the door closed behind her, Mr. MacEwan walked into the living room and sat down in the chair by the window, thankful for a little time to himself so that he could think back over his early morning experience without being confused by other people telling him what they thought he must have heard. One thing, at least, he was certain of, and he mentally checked it off with a wry smile: whatever he'd heard or thought he heard, it had been "after."

But—was it possible—was it just possible that he *had* been half dreaming, overlaying some

sound remembered from another time on his uneasy wakefulness?

In recent years, even wide-awake, his mind *did* play strange tricks on him. With no trouble at all, for instance, he could call up—so vividly that it startled him—the hated face of Georgie Stubbs who'd made the four-block walk to school such a hell when they were both in the third grade; and yet—sometimes—the dear, familiar features of his own Bessie faded so from memory that he was forced, to his shame, to go into the bedroom and look once again at her picture standing on the dresser.

He closed his eyes now and tried as earnestly and honestly as he could to recall exactly what he'd felt and heard at three o'clock this morning. And faintly but surely there came back to him the sound of those footsteps overheard; *not* the careless tread of someone going about his daytime business, but footsteps peculiar to that unhealthy hour, footsteps trying not to be heard.

He opened his eyes with relief, his sorely tried confidence in his own senses restored. Why, he might even think of a way, he was encouraged to hope, to find out exactly what *had* become of Carl Kummer since yesterday.

afternoon. It was a matter about which he now found himself increasingly curious.

He sat for a few minutes longer, watching the progress of a tiny tug pulling a seemingly impossible number of loaded barges down the sun-sparkled river. Then, as the apartment door opened and he heard Mrs. Bassett's voice, all bustling encouragement, he got up and walked back down the hall.

Stanley Kummer was standing just inside the door, and except for the stubble beginning to show darkly along his jaw, his appearance seemed little changed. His head displayed its usual tendency to wobble slightly as though it were insecurely attached to his scrawny neck, and his large hands hung down at his sides like two burdens pulling his shoulders into a permanent slope.

Mr. MacEwan grasped one of the limp hands and pressed it. "Stanley," he said, "I'm so sorry."

"You're very kind," mumbled Stanley, blinking his pale eyes. "Everyone is so kind."

"Now then, Mr. Kummer," Mrs. Bassett cut in with relentless cheer, "I think the first thing you ought to do is sit down and have a nice cup of coffee."

"Oh, really I—"

Ignoring his protests, Mrs. Bassett steered him into the kitchen and sat him down at the table. As she turned the fire on under the coffee pot she nodded with vigorous significance to Mr. MacEwan who obediently settled himself in the chair opposite.

"What I'm going to do," she nattered on, busily assembling cup and saucer and cream and sugar in front of Stanley, "is run over to the supermarket and get a few things for our lunch." She poured Stanley's coffee, then swept out of the kitchen, only to reappear a few minutes later pinning on her hat, with her purse dangling from one arm.

"I won't be long," she assured them as she started out, then added archly, "Just you boys behave yourselves now."

For some minutes after she'd left the two men sat engulfed in a silence born equally of relief and awkwardness. Stanley stared into his cup, stirring and stirring as though it were some job he had to do.

"Stanley," Mr. MacEwan ventured at last. "We were wondering—do you know where to locate your brother?"

The spoon jerked sharply against the cup, slopping coffee into the saucer, and Stanley uttered a harsh, dry laugh. "Carl," he said, "is in the land

of milk and honey." Then he explained tonelessly, "He's gone to Florida to live."

"But—" Mr. MacEwan felt a little pulse of excitement stir in him. "I met him yesterday—down in the lobby—just after five o'clock."

Stanley stared at Mr. MacEwan in blank wonder. "He was here then. I thought—"

"You didn't see him?" Mr. MacEwan prodded him gently.

"No. No, I didn't come back for dinner last night. Mr. Carter wanted me to finish up something, so I stayed late and just went on to my other job from there." He sighed. "Maybe—if I had come home then . . ." He closed his eyes. Then, suddenly, with leaden conviction, he announced, "This was all Carl's doing."

"What—" Mr. MacEwan could barely get the words out. "What do you mean by that, Stanley?"

With what seemed a tremendous effort Stanley lifted his heavy eyelids and looked at Mr. MacEwan again. "Oh," he said, "he's a great talker, Carl is. Every time he'd come to us he'd go on about all the places he'd been to, all the things he'd done. He couldn't have done anywhere near all that—he never had anything, never kept anything. And I think—in a way—Celeste knew it, but

still—after he'd left she'd always be so unhappy, so discontented for a while. He made our life seem so poor."

Stanley paused and swallowed and his great knob of an Adam's apple jumped alarmingly. "He was always like that, even when we were boys. He could almost make you believe things you'd know couldn't be so. He'd do things—Aunt Marjorie'd get so mad at him—and yet he could always sweet-talk his way out of it. He was Aunt Marjorie's favorite—even then. I guess—she just couldn't help herself."

He thought about that for a minute. Then his face darkened. "Even so," his voice rose, "even so, it wasn't fair!" And he brought his hands flat down on the table with such force that the china bounced.

He pushed himself up from the table and began to stride up and down the kitchen in great agitation. "I was the one who went up to see her every week—every week—all the years she was there. Carl never wrote, never went near her—except that one time. But that was enough. She left everything to him."

Stanley came back to the table and gripped the back of the chair till his big knuckles showed white. He almost shouted, "Was that fair?"

Mr. MacEwan shook his head numbly, sick with shame for having let his curiosity pry open this Pandora's box of private miseries. And all—all just to try to prove his own little ego-gratifying point. For a moment he could not even remember what it was any more.

"Stanley," he said helplessly. "Oh, Stanley, sit down."

Stanley slumped back into his chair. But almost immediately he leaned forward and began talking again with feverish earnestness. "It wasn't for myself, you understand. I didn't care about the money. But Celeste counted on it so. She loved nice things." He said this last with simple pride, as if it had been a special virtue in her.

"After the first disappointment though," he went on, "I thought it might even work out for the best. If Carl had money, at least he wouldn't be bothering us any more. But Celeste just wouldn't leave it at that. She kept writing to him. I tried to get her to stop. I didn't want—". He gulped. "I didn't want her to make a fool of herself."

Perhaps, and Mr. MacEwan tried hard to believe it, it was doing Stanley some sort of good to talk, to get things off his chest. But the sight of a man

torturing himself with this futile rehashing of painful events was more than Mr. MacEwan could bear. He turned his eyes for relief to the ceiling, the stove, the floor—

And there his glance riveted. His mind seemed to come to a full stop, unable, unwilling to take in what he saw there. The length of the floor where Stanley had paced up and down bore traces of the same ugly black marks that Mrs. Bassett had scrubbed off a short time before.

Mr. MacEwan finally pulled his eyes up from the floor and looked at his neighbor as though seeing him for the first time. "Why, Stanley," he said, sadly certain, "it was you I heard on the roof last night."

Stanley stopped talking and stared at Mr. MacEwan rather stupidly. Then he took a deep breath and let it out in a long racking sigh.

"I didn't come home at dinner time," he began reciting dully, "and it got quite cool later in the evening. So after I'd delivered about half the papers I decided to stop back here and get my heavier jacket. Celeste was still up. She was sitting at the dressing table writing something. She looked so pretty."

Even now—through all the layers of despair—there flicker-

ed briefly in Stanley's eyes some little tag end of pleasure at the recollection.

Then all expression drained out of them again and he went on. "I couldn't understand why she was so upset to see me. Then I saw her suitcases standing there. She said she was writing me a note, but since I was here she might just as well tell me. She said—she said she was going to Florida to be with Carl. I thought—I still thought she was just imagining that he wanted her to come. Even when she said he'd been here I didn't really believe it. I guess I didn't want to believe it. She got very impatient with me and said she was going to have some fun out of life and I couldn't stop her. And then she said—"

Stanley closed his eyes tight with the effort to squeeze out those final, hurtful words, "She said—'Oh, go peddle your papers.'

"I slapped her," he went on dully. "I never struck Celeste before in my life. But I slapped her—hard. She lost her balance and fell back against the dressing table and slid down to the floor. I started to the bathroom to get some water to bring her around. Then I looked down at her, and—I don't know—all those years—it seemed such a waste, such a waste."

He stiffened in his chair and said fiercely, "All of a sudden I just wanted to clear everything away, out of my sight. I unpacked her suitcases and stuffed everything back in the drawers. And I carried her up to the roof and—put her out of my sight, too."

He winced painfully at the memory. But his next words were chillingly matter-of-fact. "Then I came back down and got my jacket and made the rest of the deliveries." He sat silent for a minute, then there came out of him something that sounded grotesquely like a giggle. "That's why," he finished inanely, "I was late getting home from work this morning."

Into the deathly stillness that followed, Mrs. Bassett suddenly burst, profuse with apologies and explanations.

"I never in the world meant to be this long. But my land! The lines at that supermarket—" She saw Stanley then, his head in his hands. "Why, Mr. Kummer, whatever—Mr. MacEwan, what's going on here?"

Mr. MacEwan shook his head warmly at her as he rose. "Not now, Mrs. Bassett," he said quietly, and something in his face and the tone of his voice impressed even Mrs. Bassett into silence. "Are the police still next door?" he asked her.

"Why—yes," she replied uncertainly. "Some of them anyways."

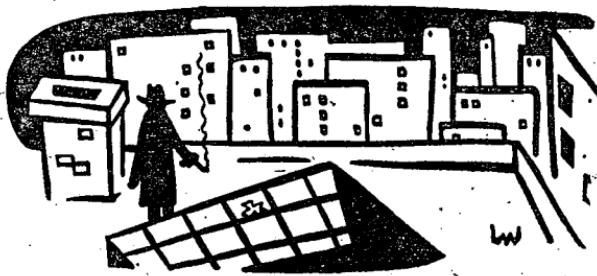
"I think," Mr. MacEwan said, placing his hand gently on Stanley's shoulder, "Mr. Kummer has something he wants to say to them."

The cruel day dragged finally to a close and Mr. MacEwan, once more alone, lowered himself gratefully into his old chair by the window—just in time to watch the sun, a perfect, distinct globe of orange, drop swiftly from sight behind the Palisades.

Well, then. He had heard what he'd thought he heard and it had meant much more than

he'd bargained for. What small satisfaction he might have gleaned from the memory of Mrs. Bassett, for once subdued and solicitous, was quite cancelled out by the thought of the Kummers' apartment, standing silent and empty now.

Mr. MacEwan sighed and, as so often before, he looked to the river for solace. In the dusk, with the lights winking on along the shore, it glistened calm and fair, never more truly "our lordly Hudson, hardly flowing." The sight settled over him like a beneficence, and when, at length, he rose to go to bed, he did so content in the knowledge that it would be waiting for him outside his window tomorrow.



# Damon Runyon

## The Snatching of Bookie Bob

John Crosby (remember when he was one of our most astute critics of the entertainment scene?) once wrote that the narrator in Damon Runyon's yarns "is really a very law-abiding guy. His friends are torpedoes, racketeers, gamblers, thieves of one sort or another," but the narrator himself "is none of these things... The Runyon world of guys and dolls never existed on Broadway or anywhere else and, because of this, they have sometimes been sharply criticized." Mr. Crosby sharply disagreed with this criticism: "If Mr. Runyon wanted to create a little world of his own fancy, he had as much right to do it as Lewis Carroll or Kenneth Grahame or anyone else." To which we shout: Bravo!

So, once again, join Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore—hard characters in every respect; but it wouldn't be nice to call them kidnapers...

Now it comes on the spring of 1931, after a long hard winter, and times are very tough indeed, what with the stock market going all to pieces, and banks busting right and left, and the law getting very nasty about this and that, and one thing and another, and many citizens of this town are compelled to do the best they can.

There is very little scratch anywhere and along Broadway many citizens are wearing their last year's clothes and have

practically nothing to bet on the races or anything else, and it is a condition that will touch anybody's heart.

So I am not surprised to hear rumors that the snatching of certain parties is going on in spots, because while snatching is by no means a high-class business, and is even considered somewhat illegal, it is something to tide over the hard times.

Furthermore, I am not surprised to hear that this snatching is being done by a

character by the name of Harry the Horse, who comes from Brooklyn, and who is a character who does not care much what sort of business he is in, and who is mobbed up with other characters from Brooklyn such as Spanish John and Little Isadore, who do not care what sort of business they are in either.

In fact, Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore are very hard characters in every respect, and there is considerable indignation expressed around and about when they move over from Brooklyn into Manhattan and start snatching, because the citizens of Manhattan feel that if there is any snatching done in their territory, they are entitled to do it themselves.

But Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore pay no attention whatever to local sentiment and go on the snatch on a pretty fair scale, and by and by I am hearing rumors of some very nice scores. These scores are not extra large scores, to be sure, but they are enough to keep the wolf from the door, and in fact from three different doors, and before long Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore are around the race tracks betting on the horses, because if there is one thing

they are all very fond of, it is betting on the horses.

Now many citizens have the wrong idea entirely of the snatching business. Many citizens think that all there is to snatching is to round up the party who is to be snatched and then just snatch him, putting him away somewhere until his family or friends dig up enough scratch to pay whatever price the snatchers are asking. Very few citizens understand that the snatching business must be well organized.

In the first place, if you are going to do any snatching, you cannot snatch just anybody. You must know who you are snatching, because naturally it is no good snatching somebody who does not have any scratch to settle with. And you cannot tell by the way a party looks or how he lives in this town if he has any scratch, because many a party who is around in automobiles, and wearing good clothes, and chucking quite a swell is nothing but the phonus bollonus and does not have any real scratch whatever.

So of course such a party is no good for snatching, and of course guys who are on the snatch cannot go around inquiring into bank accounts, or asking how much this and that party has in a safe-deposit vault, because such questions are apt

to make citizens wonder why, and it is very dangerous to get citizens to wondering why about anything. So the only way guys who are on the snatch can find out about parties worth snatching is to make a connection with some guy who can put the finger on the right party.

The finger guy must know the party he fingers has plenty of ready scratch to begin with, and he must also know that this party is such a party as is not apt to make too much disturbance about being snatched, such as telling the gendarmes. The party may be a legitimate party, such as a business guy, but he will have reasons why he does not wish it to get out that he is snatched, and the finger must know these reasons. Maybe the party is not leading the right sort of life, such as running around with blondes when he has an ever-loving wife and seven children in Mamaroneck, but does not care to have his habits known, as is apt to happen if he is snatched, especially if he is snatched when he is with a blonde.

And sometimes the party is such a party as does not care to have matches run up and down the bottom of his feet, which often happens to parties who are snatched and who do not

seem to wish to settle their bill promptly, because many parties are very ticklish on the bottom of the feet, especially if the matches are lit. On the other hand, maybe the party is not a legitimate guy, such as a party who is running a crap game—or who has some other dodge he does not care to have come out—and who also does not care too much about having his feet tickled.

Such a party is very good indeed for the snatching business, because he is pretty apt to settle without any argument. And after a party settles one snatching, it will be considered very unethical for anybody else to snatch him again very soon, so he is not likely to make any fuss about the matter. The finger guy gets a commission of twenty-five per cent of the settlement, and one and all are satisfied and much fresh scratch comes into circulation, which is very good for the merchants. And while the party who is snatched may know who snatches him, one thing he never knows is who puts the finger on him, this being considered a trade secret.

I am talking to Waldo Winchester,\* the newspaper scribe, one night and something about the snatching business

\*Guess who?

comes up, and Waldo Winchester is trying to tell me that it is one of the oldest dodges in the world, only Waldo calls it kidnaping, which is a title that will be very repulsive to guys who are on the snatch nowadays. Waldo Winchester claims that hundreds of years ago guys are around snatching parties, male and female, and holding them for ransom, and furthermore Waldo Winchester says they even snatch very little children and Waldo states that it is all a very, very wicked proposition.

Well, I can see where Waldo is right about it being wicked to snatch dolls and little children, but of course no guys who are on the snatch nowadays will ever think of such a thing, because who is going to settle for a doll in these times when you can scarcely even give them away? As for little children, they are apt to be a great nuisance, because their mammas are sure to go running around hollering bloody murder about them, and furthermore little children are very dangerous, indeed, what with being apt to break out with measles and mumps and one thing and another any minute and give it to everybody in the neighborhood.

Well, anyway, knowing that Harry the Horse and Spanish

John and Little Isadore are now on the snatch, I am by no means pleased to see them come along one Tuesday evening when I am standing at the corner of Fiftieth and Broadway, although of course I give them a very jolly hello, and say I hope and trust they are feeling nicely.

They stand there talking to me a few minutes, and I am very glad indeed that Johnny Brannigan, the strong-arm cop, does not happen along and see us, because it will give Johnny a very bad impression of me to see me in such company, even though I am not responsible for the company. But naturally I cannot haul off and walk away from this company at once, because Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore may get the idea that I am playing the chill for them, and will feel hurt.

"Well," I say to Harry the Horse, "how are things going, Harry?"

"They are going no good," Harry says. "We do not beat a race in four days. In fact," he says, "we go overboard today. We are washed out. We owe every bookmaker at the track that will trust us, and now we are out trying to raise some scratch to pay off. A guy must pay his bookmaker no matter what."

Well, of course this is very true, indeed, because if a guy does not pay his bookmaker it will lower his business standing quite some, as the bookmaker is sure to go around putting the blast on him, so I am pleased to hear Harry the Horse mention such honorable principles.

"By the way," Harry says, "do you know a guy by the name of Bookie Bob?"

Now I do not know Bookie Bob personally, but of course I know who Bookie Bob is, and so does everybody else in this town that ever goes to a race track, because Bookie Bob is the biggest bookmaker around and about, and has plenty of scratch. Furthermore, it is the opinion of one and all that Bookie Bob will die with this scratch, because he is considered a very close guy with his scratch. In fact, Bookie Bob is considered closer than a dead heat.

He is a short fat guy with a bald head, and his head is always shaking a little from side to side, which some say is a touch of palsy, but which most citizens believe comes of Bookie Bob shaking his head "no" to guys asking for credit in betting on the races. He has an ever-loving wife, who is a very quiet little old doll with gray hair and a very sad look in her eyes, but nobody can blame

her for this when they figure that she lives with Bookie Bob for many years.

I often see Bookie Bob and his ever-loving wife eating in different joints along in the Forties, because they seem to have no home except a hotel, and many a time I hear Bookie Bob giving her a going-over about something or other, and generally it is about the price of something she orders to eat, so I judge Bookie Bob is as tough with his ever-loving wife about scratch as he is with everybody else. In fact, I hear him bawling her out one night because she has on a new hat which she says costs her six bucks, and Bookie Bob wishes to know if she is trying to ruin him with her extravagances.

But of course I am not criticizing Bookie Bob for squawking about the hat, because for all I know six bucks may be too much for a doll to pay for a hat, at that. And furthermore, maybe Bookie Bob has the right idea about keeping down his ever-loving wife's appetite, because I know many a guy in this town who is practically ruined by dolls eating too much on him.

"Well," I say to Harry the Horse, "if Bookie Bob is one of the bookmakers you owe, I am greatly surprised to see that you seem to have both eyes in your

head, because I never before hear of Bookie Bob letting anybody owe him without giving him at least one of their eyes for security. In fact," I say, "Bookie Bob is such a guy as will not give you the right time if he has two watches."

"No," Harry the Horse says, "we do not owe Bookie Bob. But," he says, "he will be owing us before long. We are going to put the snatch on Bookie Bob."

Well, this is most disquieting news to me, not because I care if they snatch Bookie Bob or not, but because somebody may see me talking to them who will remember about it when Bookie Bob is snatched. But of course it will not be good policy for me to show Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore that I am nervous, so I only speak as follows:

"Harry," I say, "every man knows his own business best, and I judge you know what you are doing. But," I say, "you are snatching a hard guy when you snatch Bookie Bob. A very hard guy, indeed. In fact," I say, "I hear the softest thing about him is his front teeth, so it may be very difficult for you to get him to settle after you snatch him."

"No," Harry the Horse says, "we will have no trouble about it. Our finger gives us Bookie Bob's hole card, and it is a most

surprising thing, indeed. But," Harry the Horse says, "you come upon many surprising things in human nature when you are on the snatch. Bookie Bob's hole card is his ever-loving wife's opinion of him.

"You see," Harry the Horse says, "Bookie Bob has been putting himself away with his ever-loving wife for years as a very important guy in this town, with much power and influence, although of course Bookie Bob knows very well he stands about as good as a broken leg. In fact," Harry the Horse says, "Bookie Bob figures that his ever-loving wife is the only one in the world who looks on him as a big guy, and he will sacrifice even his scratch, or anyway some of it, rather than let her know that guys have such little respect for him as to put the snatch on him. It is what you call psychology," Harry the Horse says.

Well, this does not make good sense to me, and I am thinking to myself that the psychology that Harry the Horse really figures to work out nice on Bookie Bob is tickling his feet with matches, but I am not anxious to stand there arguing about it, and pretty soon I bid them all good evening, very polite, and take the wind and I do not see Harry

the Horse or Spanish John or Little Isadore again for a month.

In the meantime, I hear gossip here and there that Bookie Bob is missing for several days, and when he finally shows up again he gives it out that he is very sick during his absence, but I can put two and two together as well as anybody in this town and I figure that Bookie Bob is snatched by Harry the Horse, and Spanish John and Little Isadore, and the chances are it costs him plenty.

So I am looking for Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore to be around the race track with plenty of scratch and betting them higher than a cat's back, but they never show up, and what is more I hear they leave Manhattan and are back in Brooklyn working every day handling beer. Naturally this is very surprising to me, because the way things are running beer is a tough dodge just now, and there is very little profit in same, and I figure that with the scratch they must make off Bookie Bob, Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore have a right to be taking things easy.

Now one night I am at Good Time Charley's on Forty-eighth Street, speaking of this and that

with Charley, when in comes Harry the Horse, looking very weary and by no means prosperous. Naturally I give him a large hello, and by and by we get to gabbing together and I ask him whatever becomes of the Bookie Bob matter, and Harry the Horse tells me as follows:

Yes [Harry the Horse says], we snatch Bookie Bob all right. In fact, we snatch him the very next night after we are talking to you, or on a Wednesday night. Our finger tells us Bookie Bob is going to a wake over in his old neighborhood on Tenth Avenue, near Thirty-eighth Street, and this is where we pick him up.

He is leaving the place in his car along about midnight, and of course Bookie Bob is alone as he seldom lets anybody ride with him because of the wear and tear on his car cushions, and Little Isadore swings our flivver in front of him and makes him stop. Naturally Bookie Bob is greatly surprised when I poke my head into his car and tell him I wish the pleasure of his company for a short time, and at first he is inclined to argue the matter, saying I must make a mistake, but I put the old convincer on him by letting him peek down the snozzle of my John Roscoe.

We lock his car and throw

the keys away, and then we take Bookie Bob in our car and go to a certain spot on Eighth Avenue where we have a nice little apartment all ready. When we get there I tell Bookie Bob that he can call up anybody he wishes and state that the snatch is on him and that it will require twenty-five G's, cash money, to take it off, but of course I also tell Bookie Bob that he is not to mention where he is or something may happen to him.

Well, I will say one thing for Bookie Bob, although everybody is always weighing in the sacks on him and saying he is no good—he takes it like a gentleman, and very calm and businesslike.

Furthermore, he does not seem alarmed, as many citizens are when they find themselves in such a situation. He recognizes the justice of our claim at once, saying as follows:

"I will telephone my partner, Sam Salt," he says. "He is the only one I can think of who is apt to have such a sum as twenty-five G's cash money. But," he says, "if you gentlemen will pardon the question, because this is a new experience to me, how do I know everything will be okay for me after you get the scratch?"

"Why," I say to Bookie Bob, somewhat indignant, "it is well

known to one and all in this town that my word is my bond. There are two things I am bound to do," I say, "and one is to keep my word in such a situation as this, and the other is to pay anything I owe a bookmaker, no matter what, for these are obligations of honor with me."

"Well," Bookie Bob says, "of course I do not know you gentlemen, and, in fact, I do not remember ever seeing any of you, although your face is somewhat familiar, but if you pay your bookmaker you are an honest guy, and one in a million. In fact," Bookie Bob says, "if I have all the scratch that is owing to me around this town, I will not be telephoning anybody for such a sum as twenty-five G's. I will have such a sum in my pants pocket for change."

Now Bookie Bob calls a certain number and talks to somebody there but he does not get Sam Salt, and he seems much disappointed when he hangs up the receiver again.

"This is a very tough break for me," he says. "Sam Salt goes to Atlantic City an hour ago on very important business and will not be back until tomorrow evening, and they do not know where he is to stay in Atlantic City. And," Bookie Bob says, "I cannot think of

anybody else to call up to get this scratch, especially anybody I will care to have know I am in this situation."

"Why not call your ever-loving wife?" I say. "Maybe she can dig up this kind of scratch."

"Say," Bookie Bob says, "you do not suppose I am chump enough to give my ever-loving wife twenty-five G's, or even let her know where she can get her dukes on twenty-five G's belonging to me, do you? I give my ever-loving wife ten bucks per week for spending money," Bookie Bob says, "and this is enough scratch for any doll, especially when you figure I pay for her meals."

Well, there seems to be nothing we can do except wait until Sam Salt gets back, but we let Bookie Bob call his ever-loving wife, as Bookie Bob says he does not wish to have her worrying about his absence, and tells her a big lie about having to go to Jersey City.

Well, it is now nearly four o'clock in the morning, so we put Bookie Bob in a room with Little Isadore to sleep, although, personally, I consider making a guy sleep with Little Isadore very cruel treatment, and Spanish John and I take turns keeping awake and watching out that Bookie Bob does not take the air on us

before paying us off. To tell the truth, Little Isadore and Spanish John are somewhat disappointed that Bookie Bob agrees to settle so promptly, because they are looking forward to tickling his feet with great relish.

Now Bookie Bob turns out to be very good company when he wakes up the next morning, because he knows a lot of race-track stories and plenty of scandal, and he keeps us much interested at breakfast. He talks along with us as if he knows us all his life, and he seems very nonchalant indeed, but the chances are he will not be so nonchalant if I tell him about Spanish John's thought.

Well, about noon Spanish John goes out of the apartment and comes back with a racing sheet, because he knows Little Isadore and I will be wishing to know what is running in different spots although we do not have anything to bet on these races, or any way of betting on them, because we are overboard with every bookmaker we know.

Now Bookie Bob is also much interested in the matter of what is running, especially at Belmont, and he is bending over the table with me and Spanish John and Little Isadore, looking at the sheet, when Spanish John speaks as follows:

"My goodness," Spanish John says, "a spot such as this fifth race with Questionnaire at 4 to 5 is like finding money in the street. I only wish I have a few bobs to bet on him at such a price," Spanish John says.

"Why," Bookie Bob says, very polite, "if you gentlemen wish to bet on these races I will gladly book to you. It is a good way to pass away the time while we are waiting for Sam Salt."

"But," I say, "we have no scratch to play the races, at least not much."

"Well," Bookie Bob says, "I will take your markers, because I hear what you say about always paying your bookmaker, and you put yourself away with me as an honest guy, and these other gentlemen also impress me as honest guys."

Now what happens but we begin betting Bookie Bob on the different races, not only at Belmont, but at all the other tracks in the country, for Little Isadore and Spanish John and I are guys who like plenty of action when we start betting on the horses. We write out markers for whatever we wish to bet and hand them to Bookie Bob, and Bookie Bob sticks these markers in an inside pocket, and along in the late afternoon it looks as if he has a tumor on his chest.

We get the race results by phone off a poolroom downtown as fast as they come off, and also the prices, and it is a lot of fun, and Little Isadore and Spanish John and Bookie Bob and I are all little pals together until all the races are over and Bookie Bob takes out the markers and starts counting himself up.

It comes out then that I owe Bookie Bob ten G's, and Spanish John owes him six G's, and Little Isadore owes him four G's, as Little Isadore beats him a couple of races out west.

Well, about this time, Bookie Bob manages to get Sam Salt on the phone, and explains to Sam that he is to go to a certain safe-deposit box and get out twenty-five G's, and then wait until midnight and hire himself a taxicab and start riding around the block between Fifty-first and Fifty-second, from Eighth to Ninth Avenues, and to keep riding until somebody flags the cab and takes the scratch off him.

Naturally Sam Salt understands right away that the snatch is on Bookie Bob, and he agrees to do as he is told, but he says he cannot do it until the following night because he knows there is not twenty-five G's in the box and he will have to get the difference at the track the next day. So there we

are with another day in the apartment and Spanish John and Little Isadore and I are just as well pleased because Bookie Bob has us hooked and we naturally wish to wiggle off.

But the next day is worse than ever. In all the years I am playing the horses I never have such a tough day, and Spanish John and Little Isadore are just as bad. In fact, we are all going so bad that Bookie Bob seems to feel sorry for us and often lays us a couple of points above the track prices, but it does no good. At the end of the day, I am in a total of twenty G's, while Spanish John owes fifteen, and Little Isadore fifteen, a total of fifty G's among the three of us. But we are never any hands to hold post-mortems on bad days, so Little Isadore goes out to a delicatessen store and lugs in a lot of nice things to eat, and we have a fine dinner, and then we sit around with Bookie Bob telling stories, and even singing a few songs together until time to meet Sam Salt.

When it comes on midnight Spanish John goes out and lays for Sam, and gets a little valise off of Sam Salt. Then Spanish John comes back to the apartment and we open the valise and the twenty-five G's are there okay, and we cut this scratch three ways.

Then I tell Bookie Bob he is free to go on about his business, and good luck to him, at that, but Bookie Bob looks at me as if he is very much surprised, and hurt, and says to me like this:

"Well, gentlemen, thank you for your courtesy, but what about the scratch you owe me? What about these markers? Surely, gentlemen, you will pay your bookmaker?"

Well, of course we owe Bookie Bob these markers, all right, and of course a man must pay his bookmaker, no matter what, so I hand over my bit and Bookie Bob puts down something in a little notebook.

Then Spanish John and Little Isadore hand over their dough, too, and Bookie Bob puts down something more in the little notebook.

"Now," Bookie Bob says, "I credit each of your accounts with these payments, but you gentlemen still owe me a matter of twenty-five G's over and above the twenty-five I credit you with, and I hope and trust you will make arrangements to settle this at once, because," he says, "I do not care to extend such accommodations over any considerable period."

"But," I say, "we do not have any more scratch after paying you the twenty-five G's on account."

"Listen," Bookie Bob says, dropping his voice down to a whisper, "what about putting the snatch on my partner, Sam Salt, and I will wait over a couple of days with you and keep booking to you, and maybe you can pull yourselves out. But of course," Bookie Bob whispers, "I will be entitled to twenty-five per cent of the snatch for putting the finger on Sam for you."

But Spanish John and Little Isadore are sick and tired of Bookie Bob and will not listen to staying in the apartment any longer, because they say he is a jinx to them and they cannot beat him in any manner, shape or form. Furthermore, I am personally anxious to get away because something Bookie Bob says reminds me of something.

It reminds me that besides the scratch we owe him, we forgot to take out six G's two-fifty for the party who puts the finger on Bookie Bob for us, and this is a very serious matter indeed, because anybody will tell you that failing to pay a finger is considered a very dirty trick. Furthermore, if it gets around that you fail to pay

a finger, nobody else will ever finger for you.

So [Harry the Horse says] we quit the snatching business because there is no use continuing while this obligation is outstanding against us, and we go back to Brooklyn to handle beer to earn enough scratch to pay our just debts.

We are paying off Bookie Bob's IOU a little at a time, because we do not wish to ever have anybody say we welsh on a bookmaker, and furthermore we are paying off the six G's two-fifty commission we owe our finger.

And while it is tough going, I am glad to say our honest effort is doing somebody a little good, because I see Bookie Bob's ever-loving wife the other night all dressed up in new clothes and looking very happy, indeed.

And while a guy is telling me she is looking so happy because she gets a large legacy from an uncle who dies in Switzerland, and is now independent of Bookie Bob, I only hope and trust [Harry the Horse says] that it never gets out that our finger in this case is nobody but Bookie Bob's ever-loving wife.



# Patricia Highsmith

## Camera Fiend

*Murder wasn't Alex's dish. It scared him. But he'd taken half the money for the "assignment"—so what else could he do? It wasn't a pretty picture . . .*

The boy was about to dive. The lights of the Hotel Mirador's terraces went out, and torch light and bonfires illuminated the tiny figure high above the gorge.

"Isn't it exciting!" the girl whispered across the table.

Alex nodded, bored.

As the Mexican boy poised, arms out in front of him, the orchestra gave a roll of drums. In the narrow gorge the blue Pacific slapped the jagged rocks and bounced high.

For Pete's sake, jump, Alex thought. He wanted to leave.

There he went, a little brown splinter falling—*splash!* Then his head came up almost instantly, the crowds on the terraces broke into applause, and the boy took a couple of overhand strokes to the other side of the gorge and began climbing up the vertical wall of rock, like a monkey, as if he had put his feet in exactly the same places a thousand times.

"I've got to be going," Alex said, easing out of the bench seat.

"You don't want to stay for a drink?" The girl looked up at him with wide blue eyes.

Alex shook his head. "Thanks." Of all times, he thought, to run into an old school friend. On the toughest job of my life and with five thousand dollars to lose! He watched her slide reluctantly off the bench.

"I've just got two more days here," she said. "I thought maybe tomorrow I'd go on one of those sails around the bay that take off at three. Want to come along with me?"

*Three* sent a chill of fear over him. "Sorry, Sheila. I've got a date."

"A date? You said you didn't know anybody in Acapulco."

"I don't. I happened to meet a guy this afternoon. A Mexican. He's got a little fishing

boat and he offered to take me out fishing tomorrow."

"Gee, I wish I had offers like that. I've got to pay forty pesos for my trip. But I'll probably go. I want to get some snapshots of the bay. How big is the boat you're going on?"

"It's very small, I think. I don't really know—I haven't seen it."

It took him another fifteen minutes to get rid of her. She was staying at a big hotel up the hill from the bay, and they had to walk to the main plaza to get a taxi for her. The friends she had been traveling with had left for the States that morning, and she was trying to get him to ask her to dinner tomorrow night. He got off with a promise to telephone her in the morning.

He wiped his forehead when her taxi drove away. He'd been with her since 5:00 P.M. and had taken her to dinner. What more did she want? God, the way she'd come up to him—"Aren't you Alex—Alex Hammond? I'm Sheila Dobbs. I went to high school with you in Houston. What're you doing in Acapulco?" He'd told her he was here on a little vacation, which was true. He said he was living in Chicago now.

And he really had come to Mexico for a little vacation. He'd had about \$200, enough to go to Mexico for a while.

And he hadn't meant to take on another assignment, but \$5,000 . . .

Alex set his jaw. An assignment was an assignment, and he had already collected half his money. What else could he do? Ordinary jobs were practically closed to him; he had a police record. And who wanted to be somebody's delivery boy at 22? How did the police expect anybody to go straight? They didn't, he supposed. They'd lose their jobs.

But the worst was, he had a feeling he was going to be caught again. Meeting Sheila this afternoon was a bad omen.

By the next morning Alex had decided not to go through with it. He didn't just want to wait a couple of days until the girl was out of town. He wanted to get out of the whole thing.

Murder wasn't his dish. It scared him. He decided he would go down to the wharf early, talk to Manuel and tell him it was off, get some of the money back from him if he could, and return it to McGee in Mexico City. When Raney came to the wharf at three, Alex would tell him that the Mexican with the boat had called the trip off, and that they couldn't go.

Raney didn't suspect any-

thing, Alex was sure. He'd done a good job, he thought, scraping up an acquaintance with Raney apparently by accident in the fishing- and boat-supplies shop in the middle of town, then mentioning that he was going deep-sea fishing today with a Mexican who owned a boat, and wouldn't Raney like to come along?

Alex had tried to look like a nice American young man, seeing Mexico alone, who was lonely and would be glad for the company of another American even if there was a little difference in their ages. Stafford Raney was 42.

Alex knew all about Stafford Raney, even though he didn't want to. Raney was the head of an investigating committee of six that had been sent down to Mexico from Washington to make a report on the business practices of resident American real-estate dealers, exporters, and whatnot.

The Mexican government had lodged several polite complaints against some of the goings-on in their capital. Mexico City was full of American crooks who had entered the real-estate business, beer brewing, law offices—anything that would give them a front for more lucrative pursuits.

The man who had hired Alex

was in the real-estate business, and his name was Frank McGee. Alex knew a little about McGee, too. McGee had been a New York lawyer specializing in divorce cases until his disbarment two years ago. He had come to Mexico and, in a suspiciously short time, had made more than a million dollars for himself. Stafford Raney had been sent down to get the goods on people like McGee.

So McGee had found Alex. Picked up his trail, and had one of his well-groomed men call on Alex in his hotel in Mexico City.

"I hear you've done some time for larceny . . . No, no, don't get me wrong, I'm not a cop . . . I was just wondering if you'd like to do a job for us. There's a lot of money in it for you, kid. You could use some, couldn't you?"

Stafford Raney was in Acapulco for a week's rest, and his wife and two kids were coming down from Washington in a few days to join him. The time to get him was while he was in Acapulco, all alone, with no one to miss him for a while.

Alex was down at the wharf before 2:00. There were about twelve little fishing boats tied up at the wharf, but Manuel's *Tiburon II* wasn't one of them.

Alex walked up and down the

cement wharf, smoking a cigarette. 2:25 . . .

Finally Alex saw the *Tiburon II* creeping over from the other side of the bay. When he got close enough to recognize Alex, Manuel gave him a smile and a wave. Alex stooped on the wharf, waiting for him. And then, when Manuel's boat was only a few feet away, Alex heard a girl's voice behind him.

"Hi there, Alex!" Sheila trotted up, breathless, in a thin cotton dress, her camera bouncing on a strap around her neck.

Alex stood up. "Hello. Thought you were going sailing."

"Oh, they're not sailing today because they can't get enough of a crowd. What're you going to fish for?"

"Whatever's biting," Alex said, stepping into the boat. He beckoned to Manuel to follow him to the other end of the boat, away from the girl. Then he saw Raney walking toward them on the wharf.

"Good afternoon!" Raney called. "I thought I was going to be the early one!" Raney was in dark slacks and an open-necked sports shirt, and he carried his new steel pole.

"Hello, Mr. Raney," Alex said. "Well, we're all early."

No use trying to call the trip off now, Alex thought. He'd have to talk to Manuel while

they were on their way out of the bay.

Raney got into the boat and Alex introduced him to Manuel, who grinned and stammered something, giggly and nervous.

"I don't suppose you've got an extra pole or anything," Sheila said hopefully.

Alex pretended not to hear.

"Friend of yours?" Raney asked Alex. "Want to take her along?"

"No," Alex said to Raney in a low voice. He heard Manuel's first pull at the starter cord fail. "See you tonight maybe," he called to Sheila.

"Will you call me?"

With relief Alex heard the motor catch.

"Alex—hold it a minute!"

Alex glanced at her and winced. She was going to take a picture of them!

*Click!* Raney was in plain view of the camera, looking at the girl. And the boat's name was also in plain view on the stern, Alex knew. And himself—facing the camera stupidly.

"So long!" he called to the girl, turning his back.

*Click!* "Such a beautiful shot, I can't resist!" Sheila called across the few yards of water that separated her from the boat.

With a pounding heart Alex smiled at Raney. "Acapulco's full of girls," he remarked. "I

don't like them to come along on fishing trips."

Manuel hadn't seen the camera, Alex knew. He wished Manuel had seen it. Alex lit a cigarette, turning his back to Raney to hide his shaking hands. The bait, a couple of bloody chunks of sailfish meat, lay on the deck and made Alex nauseous whenever he glanced at them, which he tried avoid doing. It wasn't difficult; Alex had other things on his mind.

Raney was standing beside Manuel at the wheel. They were steering a straight course for open waters. When they left the bay, Manuel cut his motor down, set the wheel, and left it. Alex jerked his head for Manuel to follow him out of ear shot of Raney, but Raney said something to Manuel just then and Manuel went over to him, and Alex wasn't sure Manuel saw his sign.

Manuel helped Raney bait his hook, then Raney sat down in one of the two bolted-down chairs at the stern of the boat.

Alex crooked a finger at Manuel, who saw it and smiled and waved a hand limply. Manuel was squatting on his heels beside Raney as if Raney were a prey he was unwilling to leave even for a few seconds. Impatiently Alex walked to the prow and turned. Manuel was looking at him.

Alex raised his hands and made quick, erasing gestures, at the same time frowning and shaking his head. He wanted Manuel to understand. It was so important.

Manuel nodded, smiling, and looked around at the horizon.

Alex scowled, wondering if he was deliberately misunderstanding him or if his brain refused to change the course he had set it for yesterday when Alex had advanced him half the promised 6,000 pesos—\$480, a small fortune to a Mexican fisherman.

Raney had his line in the water now and was watching the wake expectantly. He was intent on his fishing, Alex noted.

Manuel stood up and took the oar that was lying on the deck near the gunwale. "Manuel!" Alex shouted.

Alex lowered his face just as it happened, but the sound of it was probably just as horrible as it would have been to see it. He had to look a moment later when he helped Manuel pull the big man out of the chair.

Raney was pinned in the chair by the socket that held the pole. Alex was reminded, idiotically, of a baby being pulled out of a high chair . . .

Alex called Sheila Dobbs at her hotel that evening at seven.

"Oh, hello-o, Alex!" she said, delighted that he really had called. "How was your trip? Did you have a good time? Catch anything?"

"Not a darned thing. Uh—" He couldn't ask her straight off about the pictures. "I was wondering if you felt like dinner."

Of course she did.

For him the evening was ghastly. As soon as she came downstairs to the lobby, Alex asked her if he could take the film and get it developed for her at a place he knew that had overnight service. But the roll wasn't finished yet, she said. There was one more picture on it. She'd have to take it tomorrow when there was light.

Alex felt exhausted by 10:00. He asked if she minded if he excused himself early. Even Sheila said he looked pale.

He had a date with her the next morning at 10:30. They went to Los Hornos, an afternoon beach, and spread a couple of straw mats on the sand to lie on. She'd brought her camera with her, as he had asked.

"Let's take that last snap," Alex said.

"Oh, I just put a new roll in. I took that last picture this morning and gave the roll to my hotel. They said they'd get the

prints back this afternoon. Two of each. I always have two of each made."

She pointed the camera at Alex's startled face. "Let me get a good one of you!"

"What shop did they take them to?" Alex asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Why?"

He called her that evening about six. "Get the pictures yet?"

"No-o, darn it! You know how slow things are in Mexico. They'll probably be ready tomorrow just after I've left for the airport." She was catching a noon plane tomorrow. "Why so quiet?"

"All that sun made me sleepy, I think." He explained tactfully that he would prefer to turn in early.

"Gee, I'm sorry. It's my last night."

He was in a sweat of frustration by the time he hung up. He went immediately to her hotel, glanced around for her in the big lobby, then went to the clerk at the desk.

"Good evening. I just wanted to know where you send films to be developed."

"Films? Yes, sir. We'll take them for you. Eight-hour service."

"I know. I want to know where. What shop?"

"Oh! Yes, sir. Here it is. La Estrella Camera Shop on the

west side of the plaza." He pointed to a business card among a dozen others under the glass-topped counter.

"Okay. Thanks a lot."

Alex took a taxi to the plaza. The camera shop was closed. A sign in the window said the shop was open from 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. It was ten-past seven.

He was there at 10:00 the next morning, but nobody arrived to open the shop until 10:20. Alex went in behind the boy who opened the door. The telephone was ringing.

The boy picked it up and spoke in Spanish. "Si, señor, I think so... Dobbs. Si, señor. As soon as they arrive."

Alex began as soon as the boy hung up. "If you've got the pictures for Miss Dobbs, I'll take them for her. I'm a friend of hers."

"Please—I no speak English."

Alex said it in Spanish, badly, but the boy got the idea. The boy said the pictures were not finished yet, but they would be ready this morning.

"Well, just let me have them as they are. The film," Alex said. "I've got to catch a plane at twelve."

"The technician has the film," the boy replied. "We do not develop here."

"Where is the technician?"  
The boy shrugged. "On La

Quebrada. I do not know the address. Señor Gonzalez arrives at eleven. He is the boss. He can tell you."

Alex cursed. He went out and walked around the plaza with his hands in his pockets, then went back to the shop just before 11:00. Señor Gonzalez had actually arrived. Alex told him he had to have the roll of film right away because he was catching a plane at noon.

"That has been arranged, sir," Señor Gonzalez said pleasantly, in English. "The prints will be sent to Miss Dobbs in Houston."

"But I want them now! I want the film!"

"There is nothing to worry about. My assistant is absolutely reliable. A messenger brought an envelope from Miss Dobbs with the stamps on it. I have sent my boy with it to the technician. The prints will go out by mail this afternoon at the latest."

"But where are the prints? Where's the technician?"

Señor Gonzalez sighed and said, "I can tell you the address, but I don't think you can make them be finished any faster. It is La Quebrada seventeen."

"Thanks," Alex said, and hurried out of the shop. It wasn't far away—up the hill from the plaza and behind the cathedral. Number 17 was a

private house which had a sign outside in English and Spanish: FILMS DEVELOPED. TWO HOUR SERVICE. PLEASE KNOCK. "Two hour service," Alex muttered, and knocked rapidly on the door.

After a minute or so a man in a worn-out smock opened the door.

"I'd like to pick up the film that was left under the name Dobbs from La Estrella Camera Shop," Alex said. "It doesn't matter if the prints are not finished."

"Ah, the Dobbs film! Si! I just sent the boy to the Post Office with it."

"When? How long ago?"

"Oh, perhaps fifteen minutes ago," the man said, smiling.

Alex was stunned for a moment. "What does the boy look like?"

The man told him; about so high, sixteen years old. No, he could not remember what color shirt he was wearing today. Nor if he had a jacket.

Alex ran down to the plaza and turned left on the Costera, the main boulevard along the sea front. He ran, but his mind was running even faster. He wouldn't catch the boy, he knew; there wasn't a chance in a thousand. And that meant he'd have to go to Houston.

He'd have to find Sheila in Houston, ask to see the

pictures, and ask her to give him the two of him and Raney in the boat. And he'd have to do it immediately, because Raney might be reported missing at any hour, any minute.

By tonight Raney's picture might be on the front pages of newspapers in Mexico City and America, too. Disappeared in Acapulco, and Sheila would think, Why, I've just been there! And she was bound to stare hard at Raney's picture, bound to notice his resemblance to the man in the boat with Alex Hammond. If she didn't do anything about it, she would tell it to somebody who would.

Staring around blankly, helplessly, at the lines of people at the Post Office windows, Alex tried to believe that she wouldn't recognize Raney. Everything would be fine then. He'd go back to Mexico City, collect the other half of his \$5,000, and leave Mexico for Chicago. He'd have to collect his other half, or McGee would suspect something, maybe start looking for him.

But suddenly Alex had a vision of himself in McGee's office, about to collect his money, and McGee saying, "You mean to tell me you knew she was taking a picture of you and you didn't do

anything about it? Why, you damned fool!"

McGee and his gang would kill him. They'd know he was going to be picked up by the police, and they'd kill him to make sure he didn't tell the police any names.

He'd go to Houston.

Leaving the Post Office, he walked to the Aeronaves ticket office on the Costera.

It was after 2:00 A.M. when his plane landed in Houston. He took a taxi into town and got out at the first hotel he saw. Even before he registered, he went to a telephone book and looked for Sheila Dobbs.

There were twelve Dobbsses but no Sheila Dobbs, and he hadn't the faintest idea where she lived. He'd have to wait till tomorrow to call, anyway.

The next morning at a little after 8:00, he went into a phone booth with fifteen dimes and began his search. The first two were "no's" and the next didn't answer.

Sheila was the ninth. A sleepy Southern voice, female, answered and said very casually, "Sure, just a minute... Sheila!"

And there she was. "Alex! You're in town? I can't believe it! What on earth are you doing here?"

He had known she would

think he was chasing her. "Just passing through on my way to Chicago. I thought I'd call you while I'm here."

Making a date, of course, was the easiest thing in the world. He called for Sheila at 6:00. The pictures hadn't arrived, and the Raney story hadn't broken. Alex knew because he had bought and checked all the papers, and he also heard the ten o'clock news in the barbecue place where Sheila drove him for dinner. He said, with a smile, he might possibly change his mind and stay on a few more days.

"Oh, I hope so!" she said, making no attempt to conceal the pleasure she felt at his suggestion, and the anxiety for fear he might still change his mind.

Alex didn't make a definite date with her for the next evening. He'd call her tomorrow at 6:00, he said, after she got home from work. Sheila would start back at her job tomorrow, Monday.

He killed the next day watching the papers and listening to hourly news broadcasts on the radio in his hotel room. Not a word about Raney. And he'd been dead four days. It was a little creepy.

He called Sheila promptly at 6:00, and side-stepped the question of dinner.

"By the way, did the pictures come?" he asked.

"You're awfully interested in those pictures considering you wouldn't make a date with me to take any!" Sheila said with a merry laugh. "Well, they did come and they're wonderful! I got a shot of La Roqueta Island that's just darling! You know, that donkey drinking beer I told you about?"

"Uh-huh. The others are good, too?"

"A dreamy one of you. Say, I think you're conceited! You're only interested in the ones I took of you!"

He said he'd be over right away, and if she wanted to go out to dinner with him, that was swell.

At Sheila's house he and Sheila and her parents looked at the pictures and talked about them, and since Sheila had her friends in the pictures to talk about, nobody asked who the tall man in the sports shirt was. Raney came out painfully clear in both the snaps. He was smiling, happy, whereas Alex had winced in one shot, the first shot, and looked wounded rather than "dreamy." Sheila was annoyed because they'd sent her only one print of each picture.

"I saw the man write down on the order that I wanted two of each. If that isn't Mexico for

you!" Sheila shook her head and laughed.

"I'll get some copies made for you," Alex said. "Just let me have the negatives."

"Oh, I can get that done. Don't bother, Alex."

Sheila's parents left them alone in the living room just before they were leaving the house, and Alex said, "I don't suppose you'd give me these two of me in the boat? I'd like to send them to my mother in California."

"Sure, you can have them. As long as I've got the negatives." She separated the two boat pictures from the rest and handed them to Alex.

"Thanks, Sheila," Alex said. He slipped them into his jacket pocket. He looked at the stack of negatives on the coffee table, just two feet away from him.

"Sheila, could I have a glass of water before we take off for the evening? I'm suddenly thirsty."

"Absolutely!" She jumped up. "Or would you rather have a coke, or perhaps a drink?"

"Water's fine, thank you. Anything wet and cool will do."

When she came back with the glass of water all the negatives were in Alex's jacket pocket with the two prints, and he stood with his back to the coffee table, shielding the spot

where the negatives had been. Alex gulped down the water.  
"Thanks, Sheila."

They went to a little restaurant that specialized in sea food. During the meal Alex said he thought he would be leaving the next day for Chicago.

"So soon? Tomorrow? I thought you were going to stay on for a while."

"Yes. I phoned Chicago today. A job I was waiting for there finally came through."

He got back to his hotel and burned the two prints and all the negatives in the bathroom basin. His hands were shaking, he hurried, and when the last negative was reduced to a little wisp of nothing, he gave a great sigh.

Alex caught an early morning plane for Mexico City. By the time he arrived, the Raney story had broken. Raney's picture was on the first page of the Mexico City tabloids, and on the second or third pages of the big newspapers: U.S. COMMITTEE HEAD DISAPPEARS DURING VACATION IN ACAPULCO

He floundered through the Spanish. There were no leads about a boat trip, that was the important thing. Raney might have been missing five days, the papers said. His absence had been reported three days ago,

but the authorities had wanted to make a careful search for him in Acapulco and among his friends in Mexico City before sending out an alarm.

"It is believed," said one paper, "that Mr. Raney may have met with foul play."

That wouldn't disturb McGee, Alex thought. McGee and his pals would have long clean lists of alibis for the past week.

Alex checked in at the Hotel Cortés and called George Bell, McGee's man who had first made contact with him.

"Well, Alex!" George said. "We've been wondering where you were."

"I've been staying quiet," Alex said. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything's fine," George said in a calm, satisfied tone. "Well, we're due for a date with Mr. McGee. By the way, I wouldn't be surprised if he has another job in mind for you."

Alex thought it would be a bad idea to tell him he didn't want another job. He'd think something had gone wrong on this one. "Okay. And when do I see you about this one?"

George chuckled. "Mr. McGee has the money for you. I haven't. Maybe some time tomorrow, Alex. I'll have to call you again. Mr. McGee's been very busy. Let me call you tomorrow, Alex."

The Raney mystery had gained momentum by the following morning. More pictures of Raney and also of his anxious-looking wife and two children, who had come to Acapulco to meet him, were on all the front pages. Washington had sent F.B.I. men. Every clue was going to be followed up by experts.

Alex got a call from George Bell that day, but George said Mr. McGee was too busy to see him until the next day. Alex agreed calmly to the date George set—4:00 P.M. tomorrow in McGee's office—but inwardly he cursed.

He thought McGee was waiting to see if the F.B.I. had anything on him, or knew anything about his acquaintance with Alex Hammond before he paid the other \$2,500 that Alex had coming to him.

But the day of the appointment brought no new clues—at least, not in the newspapers. Alex was punctual at McGee's small plush office on the Paseo de la Reforma, the Park Avenue of Mexico City.

To Alex's relief, McGee was in a good mood. He was a short, ruddy Irishman who tried to conceal his lack of height by wearing narrow-looking suits and built-up heels. He had been called the best-dressed man in Mexico.

"We're glad to see you, Alex! Sit down. Make yourself comfortable." McGee took an envelope out of his desk drawer and pushed it across the desk toward Alex. "Here you are, Alex," he said in an almost paternal tone. "You didn't have any trouble with anything, anywhere, did you?"

"Nope," Alex said. The envelope was open and he glanced at the American money, but made no attempt to count it.

"Now I have another assignment in mind—in the city," McGee began in the barely audible voice he had used when he had told Alex about the Raney assignment, though his office was soundproofed and only George Bell was present. "But I don't think we'd better go into that yet. We'll wait until this thing blows over. The F.B.I. men are all over the place, coming around here every day."

Alex pocketed the envelope. He was ready to leave.

"They haven't a clue yet," McGee continued quietly. "I know that. I talked with them yesterday and the day before. So just sit tight a while. Or take a trip to Cuernavaca if you feel like it, like a real tourist." McGee smiled and his pink cheeks glowed. "Only let George know where you'll be if

you leave town. Okay?"

McGee's telephone was ringing during his last words, and he reached for it calmly.

Alex chewed the inside of his cheek, grateful for the telephone's ringing just now, wondering how long he could stall McGee about the next job. He'd tell McGee he thought he had lost his nerve. McGee wouldn't want to hold him if he said that.

"Yeah? . . . Yeah? . . . That's very interesting," McGee was saying, and Alex suddenly became aware of the shocked, scared expression on his face.

George Bell was staring at McGee, too. "What's the matter, Mr. McGee?" he whispered, and McGee silenced him with a nervous gesture.

Now McGee was looking at Alex as he listened. The color had gone out of his cheeks. "Well, thanks," McGee said. "Sure appreciate your telling us . . . It certainly is. Very interesting . . . So long, Mr. Engeldorf." He stood up slowly, looking at Alex. "You double-crosser!" he muttered. "Idiot! Get that envelope from him, George!"

George leaped like a trained dog, and the envelope was yanked out of Alex's pocket.

"What—what happened?" Alex asked.

"Seems there were some

snapshots taken in Acapulco," McGee said in a hoarse, shaking voice. "They show you and a Mexican in a boat with Raney. They've already got the Mexican who owns the boat and he's spilled the whole story!"

McGee glanced at George. "Engeldorf said the news came in on the phone while the F.B.I. was there talking to him and his partner. They got the story from a girl in Houston. The girl's already identified you, Alex. You're sunk. You're finished. They're sending down a couple of hundred prints of those photographs—even though they seem to think you're in Chicago."

"But I—I tore up the photographs and the negatives!" Alex said, panicky.

"The girl said you stole them, all right, but the ones you took weren't the right negatives!"

"What do you mean?"

"The shop in Acapulco made a mistake. They sent the girl the wrong negatives and a couple of days later they asked her to return the negatives they'd first sent her because they were somebody else's. Boy, of all the dumb— Why didn't you take a good look at the negatives?"

Because he'd been in a hurry . . .

Alex's teeth were clamped on the inside of his cheek.

There was a taste of blood in his mouth. Damn the shop, he thought. Damn the Mexicans!

As if spellbound, he watched McGee's eyes flitting over his desk, and Alex knew he was thinking only of how to protect himself, and that there was only one way.

"Get him out of here fast, George," McGee said. "Take him to your apartment until you hear from me."

"My *apartment?*" George said in a scared voice.

"You heard me! Boy, imagine anyone knowing that they're being photographed and—"

There was a knock. McGee went to the door and opened it a crack.

The girl secretary said, "Excuse me, Mr. McGee, but there are—"

Two tall men stepped past her and entered the office.

"Why, hello there!" McGee began with false affability. "What's new, gentlemen?"

The two men were staring at Alex.

Alex stared back, unable to move. Then one of the men said, "Alex Hammond? The young man who was in the boat? And just what're you doing here?"



# Rafael Sabatini

## The Lord of Time

*It took us many years to discover that Rafael Sabatini, one of the most famous historical novelists of our time, author of THE SEA-HAWK, SCARAMOUCHE, and the memorable CAPTAIN BLOOD, wrote a series of detective-crime short stories and novelets with historical backgrounds. Here is one of those "turbulent tales"—a novelet about Count Alessandro Cagliostro, the 18th Century alchemist who did an astonishing business in elixirs of youth, love philtres, magical potions which transformed the ugliest ducklings into court beauties, and all manner of cure-alls and panaceas—to say nothing of being able to manufacture diamonds and rubies and 24-carat gold ingots at will, in any size or quantity . . .*

### Criminal: COUNT CAGLIOSTRO

It was Cagliostro's queer arresting gesture before the crucifix in the great square that supplied the decisive spur to the wishes of the Cardinal-Prince Louis de Rohan.

From the moment of his entrance into Strasbourg, in his gilded rococo coach, drawn by six cream-coloured ponies, Count Cagliostro had been the focus of attention in the town, even before he had afforded evidence of his miraculous powers.

Without fee or guerdon he cured diseases which ordinary doctors had pronounced be-

yond human relief. As a result, and very soon, the house in which he lodged was besieged from early morning to late evening by the crowds that thronged to implore his aid or to gratify in some degree the extraordinary curiosity he excited. The fame of him ran, like a ripple over water, through Alsace. His power to expel disease was accounted superhuman and was almost the least of the superhuman attributes discovered in him. He was credited with possessing the secret of the fixation of mercury and the transmutation

of metals; precious stones composed themselves under his hands from the commonest elements; he could restore youth to the aged, and he was actually master of an elixir of life itself; he possessed gifts of prophecy and clairvoyance, and he could read thoughts as easily as another might detect the signs of emotion on a countenance; to such extraordinary lengths did he carry the art with which Mesmer had lately astonished the world that he was said to have the power of controlling the very souls of men, and that he rendered manifest how far was Mesmer from understanding the application of those forces upon the wells of which he had more or less accidentally blundered. In short, this Count Cagliostro, coming no man knew whence, was being pronounced divine.

The great aristocrat, the noble Maecenas, the Cardinal-Prince de Rohan, who was more royal than the King, for in his veins ran the blood of every house that had ever given kings to France, heard of these marvels, and was moved to desire a nearer acquaintance with them. All his life a passionate student of alchemy, botany, astrology and the occult in general, the Cardinal brought to the study of the supernatural the open-minded-

ness of a credulous person. It seemed to him that if Cagliostro were indeed sincere, and not merely a charlatan, like so many in France just then, he might bring to real fruition pursuits which His Eminence had hitherto found vexatiously elusive in results. And then came the report of those queer words in the square to quicken this desire.

Count Cagliostro had gone forth one evening to take the air, followed at a respectful distance by his servant, the slight, dark, pallid fellow who bore the curious name of Abdon. The Count's appearance was that of a man in the prime of life, between thirty and forty. Of middle height, his frame was thick-set and vigorous, and he carried his big coarsely handsome head with an air of majesty on his powerful neck. He was dressed with an ostentation that in itself took the eye. His blue silk coat was laced in gold along the seams, with the sword worn through the pocket; his red-heeled shoes were fastened with buckles of precious stones; brilliants flashed in the billows of lace at his throat; rubies attached his solitaire and glowed in the buckle that held the white plumes in his hat *a la mousquetaire*. It has been testified, by practically all who

knew him, and who have left records, that few could support the direct gaze of his full, bold, dark, uncanny eyes.

As he walked, men turned to observe and to follow him, until an inquisitive crowd had formed at a respectful distance in his wake. This was customary. Just as it was customary for him, aloof and absorbed, to appear unconscious of the attention he was attracting.

And then at last he came to pause before the Crucifix in its open shrine. Leaning upon the jewelled head of his ebony cane, he stood for some moments in thoughtful, wistful contemplation.

"Strange, Abdon," he said at last, over his shoulder, to his servant, "that one who can never have seen Him should so faithfully reproduce His lineaments." There was an implication here that sent a thrill of awe through the attendant, but respectfully silent, crowd. Then, after a long pause, Cagliostro sighed and spoke again. "Do you remember that evening in Jerusalem when they crucified Him?"

The spectators caught their breath, then held it so as not to miss the answer. Abdon, bowing low with something of the Orient in his manner, replied quietly but distinctly:

"You forget, Master, that I have been with you only fifteen hundred years."

"Ah, true," said the Count. "I was forgetting. But with so many centuries to remember..." He left the sentence there, shrugged, and sauntered on.

A report of this left the Cardinal-Prince wondering whether this man of marvels was indeed divine or merely the most impudent charlatan that had ever walked the earth. His Eminence, considering it incumbent upon him to resolve the question, sent a gentleman of his following, the Baron de Planta, to command Cagliostro to wait upon him at the Château de Saverne, where his Eminence had his seat.

Cagliostro's reception of the command reflected his lofty disdain of the mighty of this world.

"If the Cardinal is ill let him come to me, and I will cure him. If he is well he has no need of me, nor I of him."

That anyone should send such a message to the Cardinal-Prince implied to the Baron de Planta that the end of the world was at hand. And this was confirmed by the manner in which the matchlessly urbane and gracious Cardinal received it.

"Sublime reply, whatever

the man may be," was his liberal opinion.

Louis de Rohan was approaching fifty at the time, but his tall figure still preserved the grace of youth as did his countenance, which, reflecting his mind, was handsome in a rather infantile way; it was so smooth of contours, and so free from lines, that his ashen hair seemed prematurely faded.

Accustomed from earliest youth to sycophancy, the proud independence of Count Cagliostro drew this great prince, temporal and spiritual, to seek the man of marvels at his lodging in Strasbourg, like the humblest suitor. There, attended only by de Planta, he waited without resentment in the thronged ante-chamber to take his turn, as was imposed by one who made a parade of awarding no precedence to rank.

What reservations the Cardinal's ingenuous mind still harboured on the subject of Count Cagliostro's claims were dispelled almost as soon as he came to stand in the Count's presence. Under the hypnotic gaze of the man's singular eyes, dark and lustrous and of a penetration that seemed unearthly, His Eminence experienced such a sense of awe that his own glance fell abashed. But when he had

accepted the proffered chair a mild resentment stirred in him that he, who had borne as an equal the gaze of kings, should have suffered himself so easily to be stared down. Determinedly he raised his eyes again, and compelled himself to meet and hold the other's glance. Soon, however, whilst Cagliostro, who remained standing before him, talked in a deep vibrant voice and in a language that was only just perceptibly French, the Cardinal became aware that it was not himself but the Count who was exercising this compulsion: that it was his own glance that was being held, and that he was powerless to withdraw it from those glittering orbs that seemed presently to wax and wane as he watched them in a helpless fascination. Rohan began to be pervaded by a sense of his own unreality; it was as if all power of will and of self-assertion had gone out of him. His senses were being further lulled into subjection by the rise and fall in rhythmical hypnotic cadences of the voice addressing him in that curious Italianate French.

"Now that I behold you, I perceive the source of your persistence, Monseigneur. We have met before."

To this the bewildered Cardinal, after a faltering search

in his memory, made answer: "I don't remember."

"How should you? Between this and that stand for you the walls of a dozen deaths, a dozen rebirths. The soul-memory deep within you is choked and smothered by the ponderous strata of all the flesh it has since worn, with the lusts, the passions, the sins and aspirations that belong to each. It was sixteen centuries ago in Antioch. You were a Roman proconsul, and I was, *mutatis mutandis*, much as I am now, a wanderer upon the face of the earth, a traveller down the ages."

Even in the befogged state of his senses this was more than His Eminence could be expected to digest. Indeed, indignation at the impudent affront to his intelligence aroused combativeness.

"You will have evidence of this?" he said, in quiet mockery.

"Evidence!" boomed the sonorous voice. "What is evidence? The thing seen. And what shall be seen of the eternal verities by poor human vision, as narrowly restricted to the immediate environment as is that of the blind earthworm to the soil in which it burrows? Can the earthworm see the stars? How, then, help him if he asks for evidence of their

existence? And how help man if he asks for evidence of what lies beyond them?"

Despite himself the Cardinal must admit that there was theological authority for these implications.

"And yet," the mystagogue continued, "since you ask for it, some evidence I shall hope to give you before all is said. So condescend to hear me out.

"You were drawn to me in those far-off days as you are drawn now, which is to say that you were inquisitive about me; inquisitive and mistrustful. Then your Roman arrogance, your Roman scepticism, obfuscated your understanding. You supposed me an impostor, a vain seducer, even as remains of arrogance and scepticism, heritage of those Roman days—a heritage which has cursed and warped your every incarnation—still afflict you now. It is so, Monseigneur. Do not interrupt me.

"In those days I was your friend. I realized the greatness latent in your soul, a soul so closely in tune with mine; and I sought to deliver it from its dull chrysalis of carnal pride, to set it free to soar in the empyrean, and from those calm altitudes to survey eternity. I would have made you lord of Life and Time, you who then, as now, were but the ephemeral lord of

a fleshly envelope. I would have spread before you the fruits of the Tree of Life and rendered you everlasting as myself. But stubborn and obstinate in your puny pride you mocked; and so I left you to your poor carnal limitations, and went my ways."

And here the Cardinal, deathly pallid, and with eyes that still stared but were now dull and vacant, contrived at last to interrupt him.

It required a supreme effort to break through the web that was being spun about his wits, to conquer a difficulty of articulation such as will trammel a man in dreams. But he conceived that he had received illumination, and at all costs he must voice it.

"I know you now," he cried. "You are the Wandering Jew, the accursed cobbler of Jerusalem who spat upon Our Lord, and is doomed to walk the earth until He comes again."

A smile swept like a shadow across the Olympian calm of Cagliostro's countenance. Sorrowfully the great, compelling eyes considered the prelate.

"How history repeats itself! So you said then, sixteen hundred years ago. When your wits were baffled by proof of my unaccountable longevity, they took refuge from the

intolerable truth in the only explanation legend offered you. But you are wrong now as you were wrong then. I am not the Wandering Jew. I am older than Cartaphilus, older than Jerusalem, where I was with Solomon at the building of the Temple. And I shall survive them both. For I have eaten of the Tree of Life. My *elixir vitae* is distilled from its fruits. To me, existence is not as a string of beads; a succession of brief moments of consciousness in eternity; fleeting, uncomprehended glimpses of the world. To me, existence is a continuous stream, visible from its source to the limitless ocean of eternity into which it flows. For me, this illusion men call Time has no reality. For I am He Who Is."

On those last five words his vibrant, metallic voice had swelled to a trumpet-note. Thence it fell again at once to its quieter level.

"Yet that you tell me again, as you told me sixteen centuries ago in Antioch, that I am Cartaphilus, proves that I have touched in you at least a chord of that soul-memory which survives deep down in each of us. What you have remembered is what you called me once before. Let me now help your poor human weakness. Look into this mirror and endeavour

to see what once you were when last I was beside you."

Leaning his elbow on the table beside the Cardinal, Cagliostro extended his left hand, which was gloved in black velvet. Cupped in the palm of it he displayed a crystal sphere something less in circumference than a tennis-ball.

So dominated by now that, in obeying, he experienced no sense of derogating, Rohan directed his gaze as he was bidden. For some moments he stared into the empty depths of the crystal. Suddenly he moved and caught his breath. He leaned forward, peering.

"I see, I see," he murmured thickly. "I see men; a multitude; an arena; a pillared marble tribune."

"Centre your gaze upon that tribune," Cagliostro commanded. "What do you find there?"

"A man of medium height and powerful frame, boldly featured, with eyes that burn their way into one's brain. He is in white; a snowy chlamys edged with gold. I know his face. Ah! It is yourself."

"And the man in the chair? Look at him: the man who sits elbow on knee and chin on fist, with a proud sad face that is wreathed in weariness and disdain. Can you name him?"

The Cardinal bent closer

still; he hesitated, breathing heavily. "Can it be myself?"

The gloved hand closed upon the crystal and was swiftly withdrawn. Cagliostro drew himself erect, and his voice rang hard. "Yourself. Marcus Vinicius, as you then were named."

The abruptness of movement and tone seemed to shatter a spell. Rohan sat up, restored to a normal alertness. The colour crept back into his cheeks. He passed a hand, long and slim, and delicate as a woman's, across eyes and brow.

"You are master of strange secrets, sir," he said slowly and gravely. Then he added a complaint. "My senses are a little dazed, I think."

"That will pass." Cagliostro spoke harshly, and waved a hand contemptuously. "No man may look down the ages and hope to escape vertigo. It will pass. What I have discovered to you, however, remains. So that you have faith, you may now prevail where you failed before. To help you I am here; for your soul is now of a strength to bear the secrets I could impart to you, to employ the power which must never be bestowed unworthily. I am at your service, Prince Louis. And my coming is timely, if only so that I may restore your fortune so sadly sapped by the Prince de Guéménée."

The Cardinal was startled.  
"You know that?"

Again Cagliostro waved a hand. He was prodigal of gesture. "Does not all the world know it?" he asked, like a man scorning to make a mystery of the possession of knowledge reached by ordinary channels.

It was, indeed, common knowledge how much of his fortune Louis de Rohan had sacrificed to buttress the honour of his family which had been so sadly imperilled by the bankruptcy of his nephew, the Prince de Guéménée. Vast though his wealth might be, it could scarcely bear the strain of some thirty millions which that bankruptcy was imposing upon it. With deeply rooted habits of prodigal expenditure in the maintenance of his more than princely establishment, without knowledge of economy, a knowledge which his munificent spirit scorned to acquire, the Cardinal-Prince was sweeping towards the edge of financial difficulties.

He was not, however, at present concerned with this. His thoughts were consumed in the endeavour to extricate the present startling experience from the fog, as of a dream, that seemed to enshroud it.

"It is all strange," he murmured. "So very strange!"

Incredible! And yet something within me seems to compel belief."

"Now God be thanked that you are at last given grace to conquer the obstinacy of material scepticism. You yield at last to the instinctive knowledge of reincarnation deep in each of us: the oldest and strongest of human beliefs, persistent in spite of temporary occlusions; a belief that is at war with no creed that ever was."

"Yes, yes, that is true," the Cardinal agreed, with the eagerness of one who persuades himself. "There is no heresy in that belief. It can be reconciled. No heresy that I can perceive."

"There is none," said Cagliostro, as one speaking with full authority. "We will return to that. Meanwhile, there are Your Eminence's pressing needs." His tone blended condescension with command.

"Ah, yes." The Cardinal's will—never, it must be admitted, of the strongest—continued in suspension, a thing that veered as Cagliostro blew upon it. He smiled wanly. "My nephew's affairs are absorbing millions."

Cagliostro, erect, dominant, his great head thrown back, made a wide gesture of effacement. "Dismiss your anxieties. I have been stigmatized

a magician, and persecuted as a warlock, by the ignorance of men. But, as you will come to perceive, I practise no magic that is not the natural magic of knowledge, the application of the hidden forces of nature, the fruits of study and of long centuries of experience. Among the secrets I have mastered, building upon what I learned in ancient Egypt from the priests of Isis, who already had glimmerings of these sciences, three are pre-eminent: the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone with its power of transmuting metals, and the gift of healing all ills to which the flesh is subject. The last I hold at the disposal of suffering mankind; the second I place at the service of those whom I can trust not to abuse the power that gold bestows; the first I guard most jealously from all save the few—the very few—who, under the most rigorous tests, give proof that the indefinite prolongation of their lives will be for the benefit of humanity.

"When I shall have relieved your most urgent need, as I so easily can, and when, thereby, I shall have increased your faith in me, we may, if you so incline, turn our attention to matters of real and abiding weight."

There was much more of the same kind before they parted

on that fateful day. It followed from it that Count Cagliostro presently transferred himself from his Strasbourg lodging to be an honoured guest at the Cardinal-Prince's imposing Château de Saverne. There, by the orders of a bemused prelate at once attracted and repelled, who knew not what to believe, a laboratory was prepared for him. And there, one day, a month later, he set a crown to the empire he was obtaining over Louis de Rohan by demonstrating that his claim to transmute base metal into gold was no mountebank's boast. From the crucible set up in that laboratory he withdrew an ingot of pure gold of the value of five thousand livres, which under the Cardinal's eyes he had transmuted out of lead. He presented it to his noble host, as a mere earnest of all that was to come, with as light and casual a manner as if he were handing him a leaf plucked from a tree in passing.

For the manufacture of more, however, there were certain ingredients that Cagliostro lacked, and so as to come within reach of these he proposed to his noble patron that they should transfer themselves to Paris, to the Hôtel de Rohan.

Meanwhile, pending this removal, his apartments at the

Château de Saverne were daily becoming more and more thronged by all that was noble, wealthy and fashionable in Alsace, attracted by his fame as a healer and a man of marvels, a fame which rippled thence in ever-widening circles over the face of France, and set Paris itself agog in expectation of his advent.

Arrogant, domineering, impatient even, he would move through the press of distinguished suitors, his great head thrown back, his terrible, uncanny eyes at once dazzling and awing those upon whom he fixed them. Waving his short, powerful, jewelled hands in fantastic gestures, he chattered constantly in that queer, inflated jargon of his that was compounded of Italian, Italianate French and scraps of Spanish, a sort of *lingua franca* that would have been more or less understood in any country where a Romance language was spoken. He was abrupt and harsh of speech and manner, observing few of the amenities that obtained in the polite world which now paid court to him. But as a healer his success was manifest; and not only with malingers and hypochondriacs, but also with the genuinely afflicted. Sometimes he would display his powers of reading the secrets of a man's

soul, and sometimes he would even foretell a future event.

Very soon the respect commanded for him by the aegis of the Cardinal-Prince was converted by the clear magnitude of his own arts into reverence and even worship. No enemy troubled the serenity of his days until suddenly the Prince de Guémenée, the man whose dishonest extravagances had rendered Cagliostro's services so timely to the Cardinal, came gliding like a malevolent snake into this Eden.

Monsieur de Guémenée was a hard-bitten man of the world, regarding the Hereafter with a good deal of mistrust, and of the Present accepting no more than those material parts of whose reality his senses enabled him to test the evidences. The charlatanism and quackery which in that disjointed period of transition were rampant in France moved him to contempt. That his uncle, the uncle upon whom he was depending for his existence, should be falling a prey to one of these empirics—for that was Monsieur de Guémenée's view of Count Cagliostro—aroused in him the remorseless anger that is born of selfish fear.

He descended suddenly upon the Château de Saverne with intent to disillusion the Cardi-

nal and send the warlock packing. Armed with something besides indignation and common sense, he never doubted that he should accomplish his object.

He arrived in the dusk of a September day, and, being bidden to supper so soon as he had changed from his travelling-clothes, he must curb until afterwards his agnostic impatience.

It was not necessary that Cagliostro should be pointed out to him among the considerable company at the open table kept by the munificent Cardinal. The man's dominant air and magnetic personality made him sufficiently conspicuous. Although overdressed—his black satin-coat was excessively gold-laced, and he wore with it a red waistcoat—and over-jewelled, and although his table manners left much to be desired, yet he escaped being ridiculous or even vulgar by the majestic assurance of his demeanour.

Observing the spell which the man appeared to cast upon those about him, meeting once or twice and finding himself unable to support the glance of those singularly uncanny eyes, Monsieur de Guéménée began to apprehend that the battle ahead might sternly test his strength.

Nevertheless he engaged it intrepidly with his uncle in the magnificent pillared library whither the Cardinal conducted him after supper.

His Eminence took a seat at his ormolu-encrusted writing-table, whilst his nephew faced him from a tall arm-chair upholstered in red velvet on which was embroidered an R surmounted by a coronet.

Monsieur de Guéménée was approaching thirty. Like his uncle he was tall and slender, and he bore also in his countenance a strong resemblance to the Cardinal, but lacked the Cardinal's gentle candid air. He sat back, crossed his legs, and plunged straight into the matter.

"I have come, Monseigneur, to talk to you about this man who calls himself Count Cagliostro."

His Eminence, of imperturbable urbanity, looked mildly at his nephew.

"How should you prefer to call him, Charles?"

"An impudent impostor," was the downright answer. "A common swindler; a quacksalver whose proper place is on the Pont Neuf; a charlatan who makes a victim of Your Eminence. What his real name may be I have not yet ascertained."

The handsome Cardinal be-

trayed no annoyance. But there was some sorrow in his glance. "I could bear with a good grace to be such a victim as Count Cagliostro makes me. I can bear it thankfully even; and so, my dear Charles, should you, considering how much we are likely to owe to him."

"Ah! And how much is he likely to owe to you by the time he has invaded Paris, as I hear is the intention, under your exalted sponsorship; by the time you have presented him at Court and set him on the way to swindle all the people of our world?"

"You are vulgar and commonplace in your views, Charles. God commiserate me that I should discover it in a man of my own blood."

Monsieur de Guéménée leaned forward. "Monseigneur, I have been looking into this man's history."

"In that case, my dear Charles, perhaps I can add something to the information you already possess. Look at this ring." He held out a fine white hand on the middle finger of which gleamed a magnificent brilliant carved with the Rohan arms. "That is a gift from Count Cagliostro. And not only a gift, an evidence of his powers. It is a creation of his own. In the laboratory above-stairs I, myself, saw it taken

from the crucible in which it was fused by him."

"Jugglery!" scoffed Monsieur de Guéménée. "Common jugglery. If he can do that, what need to live upon you?"

"He does not live upon me. Here it is he, not I, who is the benefactor. And what of the cures he daily makes upon all-comers, sometimes of maladies accounted mortal? Is that jugglery? And all is done freely, without recompense, for the love of humanity. Is that the way of an impostor, a quacksalver? And then the alms he distributes, the gold he makes. Jugglery? A stupidity of the malicious. For if he is indeed a juggler, he must be the richest juggler that ever lived. Whence does he derive his wealth?"

His Eminence set the question with the air of a man delivering checkmate. But Monsieur de Guéménée had an answer ready.

"I can enlighten Your Eminence upon that, for I have been at pains to inform myself. He derives it from the lodges of so-called Egyptian free-masonry which he has been founding in France and elsewhere; he derives it from the sensation-seeking gulls whom he initiates into these clap-trap mysteries and from whom the Grand-Copht, as he calls himself, demands rich fees."

The Cardinal stiffened and sat bolt upright, unable, despite his deep-seated amiability, to restrain resentment.

"If you come to me merely as a retailer of vulgar scandal, of almost blasphemous calumny, I will not listen to you further."

"A moment's patience, Monsieur. There is something else; something you may easily investigate for yourself, and not so easily dismiss. If you will condescend to hear me, I will—"

And then the double-doors were thrown open by a lackey, who entered, ranged himself aside and announced:

"His Excellency, Count Cagliostro."

Monsieur de Guéménée sank back into his chair with a movement of petulance as the man of marvels came into view. He made a deliberate entrance, grave and masterful, from the carriage of his head to the manner in which he set his feet, and his eyes, the while, were steadily upon the Prince de Guéménée. He had seen the hasty movement and observed now the sullenness which the young man was not concerned to conceal.

As the door closed, he halted, and, maintaining that steady regard under which Monsieur de Guéménée, to his profound annoyance, began to

feel uncomfortable, he spoke, subduing his resonant voice.

"If I seem to be inopportune, Monsieur de Guéménée, if I interrupt the criticisms you were about to offer, you have in this more matter for thankfulness than you may suspect."

The Cardinal smiled his satisfaction at this immediate evidence of Cagliostro's supernatural gifts of omniscience. But Monsieur de Guéménée did not choose to be impressed.

"An easy guess, sir. I trust, for the sake of the wits of those you delude, that you have more convincing tricks of clairvoyance."

His Eminence flushed with pain at this coarse insult. He would have spoken, but the mystagogue raised a hand in a gesture that imperiously commanded that the answer be left to him. He had remained standing on wide-planted feet within a yard or so of Monsieur de Guéménée, and his uncanny eyes never left the young man's face. He spoke quietly.

"There is no ground for resentment. Monsieur de Guéménée but makes himself the mouthpiece of the vulgar and of the base calumny in which the vulgar deal. Men will sneer at what they do not understand. That is why they remain fast in the slime of their

brutish ignorance. Kindliness dictates that I deliver Your Eminence's nephew from the fog that envelops him to his own hurt. If Your Eminence will give me leave alone with him for a few moments I shall hope to accomplish it."

Rohan smiled. "That will be yet another miracle." He rose at once. "By all means, since you are so generously disposed, enlighten this maladroit young man. I shall be at hand, in my closet."

He moved, tall and stately, with a silken swish of his scarlet robes, to a little door that led to a small adjoining chamber which he frequently used for his studies. Monsieur de Guéménée sprang to his feet, at first purely out of deference to his uncle. But as the little door closed upon His Eminence he betrayed yet another reason for that sudden rising.

"Monsieur Cagliostro, I have no wish to hear you. I will not remain to be annoyed by your impertinences."

The Count, who had deferentially been facing the door through which His Eminence had passed, turned slowly to confront him.

"Are you afraid, Monsieur de Guéménée?"

"Afraid?"

"Of being convinced against your preconceptions, of seeing

your prejudices destroyed. Look at me. Look in my face, in my eyes, sir."

The Prince looked up to meet that burning intent glance, then lowered his eyes again, his manner sullen. "Why should I do that?" he asked contemptuously.

"To conquer the difficulty you experience in doing it."

"Difficulty? You want to laugh, I think." And in defiance, so as to prove how easily he could support those awful eyes, he stared boldly into them.

"Sit down, Monsieur de Guéménée," the Count commanded, and with a shrug Monsieur de Guéménée sank again into the tall red chair.

"Why, here's to humour you, then. But I warn you not to strain my patience." He was conscious even as he spoke that he was using jactancy as a cloak for vague discomfort, for an irritating sense that he was being dominated:

Count Cagliostro began to talk, in a low, crooning voice. "I remember once, nearly two thousand years ago, as I was walking one evening on the shore of Lake Tiberias, I met a man whose mind was as obstinately delimited as is your own to the things that may be apprehended through the bodily senses."

After that, partly because what the mystagogue said seemed gibberish, partly because of the jargon in which he delivered himself, the Prince could understand but little of what he was being told. But as he listened, consciousness vaguely grew that something was happening to him, something which inspired him with an increasing dread, yet from which he could no longer escape. The glare of the eyes into which he was staring had become intolerable, yet he found himself powerless to seek relief by averting his gaze. His own eyes were held as irresistibly, as inexplicably, as his very will to avert them was caught in some impalpable tentacle against which it seemed useless to struggle. The eyes into which he gazed grew in size to the dimensions of the eyes of an ox; they continued to dilate until they were great twin pools gradually merging into a single glowing pool in which he felt that presently he must plunge and drown himself. And all the while that droning voice growing more and more distant was pursuing with its unintelligible narrative, adding something to the utter subjugation of his senses. Gradually at first, then with increasing swiftness, his consciousness diminished until it was totally blotted out.

For what ensued we must follow Monsieur de Guéménée's own account as set down by him in a letter some years thereafter. He was awakened from that singular slumber into which he had lapsed by the booming of a great bell, like that of *Notre Dame*, which resolved itself as consciousness cleared into the tinkling note of the *Sèvres* clock on the overmantel striking the hour of ten.

From this he knew that his lapse could only have been momentary, and as he recovered he found that the queer spell to which he had been succumbing was shattered, and he was once more entirely himself. He was still seated in the tall red chair, but Cagliostro no longer stood before him. The man of mystery had moved over to the fireplace, and was planted there now beside the clock, his shoulders to the overmantel.

Monsieur de Guéménée's first and dominant emotion was indignation, the more bitter because he could not understand the nature of the trick that had been played upon him. It was from anxiety to show that this trick, whatever it might be, had failed that he sprang to his feet and gave expression to his wrath in terms that took no account of Cagliostro's feelings.

"Miserable buffoon, do you dream that you can constrain me to remain here to listen to your lying explanations? If you do, you are as mistaken as when you suppose that I could be deceived by them. I have nothing to say to you, nothing to hear from you. My affair is with your silly dupe, His Eminence, my uncle."

Cagliostro remained impassive. "So be it, sir. I'll not detain you. I merely ask that you remark the time. You will have noted that it has just struck ten."

"Go to the devil," said de Guémenée and strode tempestuously across the room, to pass into the closet to which the Cardinal had withdrawn. He was conscious of being swept along by a tide of ungovernable anger, and this was swollen by the mildness with which the ever urbane Cardinal-Prince received him.

His Eminence stood reading by a bookcase on the far side of the little room. Between him and his nephew there was a writing-table, on which some documents were pinned down by a paper-weight in the shape of a miniature, but fairly solid, silver battle-axe. At his nephew's gusty entrance he closed the book upon his forefinger and looked up.

"Well, Charles? Has His

Excellency satisfied you?"

Recklessly out of his towering passion the young man answered: "Do you suppose me as besotted as yourself that I could condescend to listen to that charlatan's impostures?"

"Charles!" His Eminence raised his brows, his eyes grew round in horror. "I think you are wanting in respect."

"What respect do you inspire, you, a Prince of the House of Rohan, lending yourself to the swindling plans of this scoundrel, this gaol-bird?"

His Eminence stiffened where he stood. His voice was cold and stern.

"Monsieur, you go too far. You will leave my house at once, and you will never enter it again until you have sued for and obtained pardon, both from me and from Monsieur de Cagliostro, for your insulting words."

"Sue pardon from this mountebank! I?"

"On your knees, Monsieur."

"Why, you fool," stormed Monsieur de Guémenée, lost in his rage to reason and decency alike, "do you know what he is? Do you know, for example, that in England he was gaoled for swindling and for debt? I have proofs of it, and . . ."

"I care not what you have,

Monsieur. You will leave my house at once. I do not permit myself to be addressed in such terms as those which you have employed. You have gone too far. You have forgotten the respect due, not only to my person, but to my office. In all my life this has never happened to me before. You say that this man has been gaoled for debt. Whether it is true or not, that fate is one that is very likely to overtake you in the near future; for from this moment you cease to interest me; you may wrestle with your own difficulties, and yourself satisfy the creditors you have abused, as you have abused my patience and my good nature. Not another penny of mine shall stand between you and the fate you have invited."

"My God!" cried Monsieur de Guéménée. But even now there was more anger than dismay in his soul.

"With that knowledge take your departure, sir, and do not venture to return. You are an ingrate whom I never wish to see again."

Trembling with fury, Monsieur de Guéménée steadied himself with a hand upon the writing-table. He controlled himself to ask in a voice that was dangerously steady, considering his condition: "Is that your last word, Monseigneur?"

With a great dignity the Cardinal replied: "My last word, Monsieur."

"Then your last word it shall be," said his frenzied nephew, and, snatching up the silver battle-axe, he hurled it straight and true at his uncle's august head. He saw it strike him full upon the brow before His Eminence could so much as put up a hand to avert the unexpected missile; he saw the blood gush forth; saw the tall scarlet figure sway an instant where it stood, the fine hands clawing the air as if seeking a support; then, with a sound as of a rush of wings, the Cardinal-Prince sank together, crumpled and fell, to lie inert.

Terror-stricken by his deed, his blind rage driven forth by panic, Monsieur de Guéménée leaned forward over the table, clawing its sides with nerveless hands. "Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" he cried, in a choking wail, then sprang past the table and went to kneel beside the fallen man. Horror came up like a great tide about him at sight of the gaping vertical wound in the brow, where the axe, hard-driven at close quarters, had split the skull. His Eminence was quite dead.

Then, as he knelt there, paralysed in body and in spirit, he heard the door open softly

behind him. He looked up and round, to behold Cagliostro, stern and grim, upon the threshold.

"Wretched man, what have you done?" asked the vibrant voice.

The Prince leapt to his feet. There was blood on his hands and on the ruffles at his wrists. "It is your act," he raved. "Yours. It is you who are responsible for this."

Cagliostro preserved a terrible calm. "Tell that to your judges if you think it will save you from being broken on the wheel, from being disembowelled alive for this hideous parricide. Ah, you quail! But that is the least of the punishment in store for you. You will have earned the execration of all upright men for this horrible murder of your uncle and benefactor. Your name will hereafter become a byword."

"Cease! In God's name, cease!" cried Monsieur de Guéménée. "Do you think I do not realize it?" And then his tone changed to a piteous whine. "Sir, sir, you are reported to possess more than human powers. Of your pity, help me in this my dreadful need."

"Ah! You believe in me now. It is true that I possess more than ordinary human

powers; but the power to raise the dead is not within them."

"Is it not? Is it not?" Monsieur de Guéménée reverted abruptly to his earlier frenzy. He was leering now with wicked cunning. "So much the worse for you. Since yours is the blame, you shall bear the punishment. I will rouse the house, and declare that it was you who did this thing. What then, my friend? What then? Will your word weigh against mine, do you suppose?"

Cagliostro smiled. "Ingenious. Unfortunately there is a witness. Look behind you, Monsieur."

Startled, Monsieur de Guéménée looked round. Dimly in the shadows of a farther doorway, a doorway of whose existence he had been in ignorance, he discerned the figure of a man. Looking more closely, his straining eyes recognized the Baron de Planta. "How long have you been there, Monsieur?" he asked.

Cold and stern, the Baron answered him: "From the moment that you threw the axe."

The courage went out of Monsieur de Guéménée, taking all fury with it. He raised his blood-stained hands in a gesture of impotence. "What shall I do? *Mon Dieu*, what shall I do?"

"What are you prepared to

do if I can save you?" asked Cagliostro.

Monsieur de Guémenée faced him; advanced towards him.

"Save me, do you say? Do you mock my distress? What help can you, what help can any, give? You have said that you cannot raise the dead."

"True. But I can undo what is done. Even that is possible to such as I, for I am He Who Is. Listen, my prince, and seek to understand. This-deed of yours is something done in time. Time, sir, is not a reality, not one of the fundamental verities. It is an illusion, a human convention for the measuring of actions concerned with our little moment of existence, this heartbeat in eternity which we call life. To such as I who stand untrammelled by the bonds of time, the past and the future are as they are in eternity; that is to say they are not at all; for in eternity there is always and only the present. If I were to turn time back for you, Monsieur de Guémenée, if I were to turn it back to the moment at which you rose to go in quest of your uncle, so that all that now lies in the past would lie once more in the future and would be inevitable —if I were to do this, what would you do for me?"

"For you?" Monsieur de

Guémenée could only stare and stare. Nevertheless, he answered the fantastic question, passionately sobbing, "God knows there is nothing that I would not do."

Cagliostro approached him, smiling gently. "I ask a little thing of you in return for so much. You have procured from England evidence that I was in prison there. You have been at great pains to do this simply so that you might destroy my credit with your uncle, and raise a barrier to my accompanying him to Paris. I am not the first great prophet who has suffered imprisonment. Some have even been put to death by the vicious ignorance of men. For myself I fear nothing from that revelation. But others whom I am concerned to help and serve must suffer if, yielding to prejudice, they should turn from me.

"What I offer you now is this: if you will swear to me on your honour as a gentleman to destroy this evidence which you have wasted such pains in obtaining and never to mention this matter to a living soul, I on my side will so put back the clock for you, that what has been will be still to come and may therefore be avoided. Do you swear, Monsieur?"

There was such firm authority in the voice that even the

Sadducean mind of Monsieur de Guéménée was more than half conquered by it. Feebly, the other half still battled with reason.

"What you are proposing is impossible."

"Will you make the experiment? Will you swear as I require? It is your only hope."

Desperately came the answer: "I swear! I swear!" and in pursuit of it, the oath was circumstantially given in the terms Cagliostro dictated.

As Monsieur de Guéménée uttered the last formidable word of it, his senses swam. He had a moment of faintness, which even as it overtook him he attributed to the strain of what he had endured. Then his senses cleared, and as sight, momentarily occluded, was restored to him, he found himself in the library, seated once more in the tall red chair, his legs composedly crossed.

For a moment he could not understand how he had come there, or, indeed, anything. His wits were in chaos. Then, out of it, emerged a sharp pellucid perception of the thing he had done and of the horrible situation in which he found himself. Wild-eyed he looked round, and saw Cagliostro standing as before by the overmantel in such a position that his shoulders eclipsed the

face of the Sèvres clock. He stood with wide-planted feet, his countenance as enigmatically calm as that of Amhitaba upon his nenuphar.

"Well, sir? Well?" The sight of him thus stirred Monsieur de Guéménée to distraction. "You know what is to do."

The booming voice answered him. "It is done."

"Done? It is done?"

Cagliostro shrugged in weariness. "The stupidity of human nature can be unfathomable. Did you expect to witness some visible, material operation? What is done is an effort of the spirit, of the will, sir. Look at your hands."

The Prince obeyed. He turned his hands about as he stared at them. They were white and clean; there was no faintest trace of blood upon them or upon his ruffles. Vacantly, foolishly, he looked again at Cagliostro, and Cagliostro answered the agonized question in those wide eyes.

"I have accomplished no less than I promised, Monsieur de Guéménée. We have stepped back in time." He moved aside, disclosing the face of the blue and gold Sèvres clock, and as he moved it began to strike the hour of ten, just as it had struck in the moment before de Guéménée had risen to go to his uncle.

A sense of awe encompassed him, of a quite different order from the last. His heart was beating in his throat; he had a sensation of stifling. He was in the presence of forces that he could not understand. Then, with reviving scepticism, another dread arose. He was the dupe of some imposture. Hands could be wiped; clocks could be turned back; but the dead could not be restored to life.

As if answering his thought, Count Cagliostro crossed the room to the closet door, opened it, and spoke.

"I think Your Eminence will now find Monsieur de Guémenée persuaded of the error with which he did me injustice."

From within the closet he was answered by a movement made manifest by the rustle of silken robes, and, as Monsieur de Guémenée sat forward, wild-eyed, clutching the arms of his chair, the tall handsome figure of the Cardinal came into view and paused under the lintel. His Eminence, smooth of brow and calm of eye, composed and urbane as ever, was quietly smiling his satisfaction.

"I knew he would find it easy to convince you, Charles, and I rejoice in it. Men of the same blood must hold together

in all important things." His elegant hand was placed affectionately upon Cagliostro's shoulder. "You will find His Excellency, Charles, the arch-enemy of all fraud and error. Trust him as I do, and you cannot fail to profit by it."

"I think he holds the proof of that," said Cagliostro.

Monsieur de Guémenée, breathing with difficulty, answered nothing. He asked himself had he merely dreamt, was he still dreaming, or had some unfathomable miracle been wrought? Then, as his uncle advanced into the room, he remembered the deference due to that august personage, and staggered like a drunkard to his feet.

Many years later, in his prison in the fortress of San Leo, when his thaumaturgy had brought him into the clutches of the Holy Office, Cagliostro told this story to a young Dominican who had been charged to show him the error of his ways.

"When we reflect," he ended, "that all this that the Prince de Guémenée had seen and heard and felt and done had no existence save in my mind and will, may we not ask what, after all, is objective truth?"

# Jacob Hay

## The Belkamp Apparatus

*Lucius J. Belkamp looked like a plain, ordinary businessman—in sewing machines. He was the most completely inconspicuous and forgettable man this side of the Iron Curtain. In appearance and manner he was, therefore, the perfect spy—indeed, he was so perfect that even the professionals, even the expert counterprofessionals, had no chance against so formidable a secret agent . . .*

### Spy: LUCIUS J. BELKAMP

It was Lucius Belkamp's wretched misfortune to be everywhere mistaken for a spy, although this was hardly surprising. Anyonè with a cover story so unimpeachable as Lucius Belkamp's simply had to be a spy, in the considered view of quite a number of exceedingly astute chiefs in those shadowy departments whose business is espionage and its prevention.

For one thing, he was inconspicuous. Too inconspicuous; too absolutely forgettable. Five minutes after you had met him you would be unable to remember what color his eyes and hair were. His clothing was neither notably American or European in cut,

and his neckties seemed to be all one color, somewhere between a very dark blue and black.

For another, there was his job. It was too pat. World Sales Research Representative of the New American Standard Sewing Machine Company of Grand Rapids, Mich.—that's what his calling cards read. Ha!

For still another, there was Lucius' miserable luck, for that is the only way to describe it. It was pure coincidence and nothing more that brought him to the Congo on the eve of the bloody disturbances there; a fouled-up airline schedule took him to Addis Ababa just hours before a military coup attempted unsuccessfully to

topple the Conquering Lion of Judah from his throne. A missed train connection caused him to arrive in the capital of yet another monarchy, this one Middle-eastern and corrupt, moments after a plastic bomb had eliminated the king and several of his more obnoxious ministers in a splendid burst of flame and noise. And so it had gone for Lucius wherever he went.

Word of this sort of thing has a way of getting around in intelligence circles abroad, although, of course, it did not at first reach the Central Intelligence Agency. It is widely accepted in these same circles that there is no point in disclosing to a foe, real or potential, that you are aware of the identity of a man you feel reasonably certain to be one of the foe's top operatives. Instead, in Moscow and Warsaw, in Cairo and Johannesburg, in Paris and London, dossiers began to be compiled. In Ebensburg, Pa., Lucius' birthplace, strange men, posing as F.B.I. agents conducting a routine security check, learned every detail of Lucius' youth and schooling. Other questions were asked of the dwellers in the apartment house in Grand Rapids where Lucius maintained his austere bachelor's flat for those brief intervals be-

tween his global travels on behalf of the New American Standard Sewing Machine Company.

In accord with the most modern espionage practice, Lucius was never arrested, never detained at a border for examination of his baggage. Rather he was placed under constant surveillance by the counterespionage departments of whatever country he chanced to visit in his ceaseless quest for new sales areas. His rooms and bags were then quietly and invariably searched in minute detail. The fact that nothing was ever found during these searches served only to increase the admiration of the counterintelligence chiefs charged with keeping an eye on Lucius.

*"An agent formidable,"* was the view of the Deuxième Bureau.

*"Sehr klug,"* was the phrase applied by the Gehlen Organization. The Russian loses something in the translation, but it amounts to much the same thing.

"Whatever it is, he's up to something big and hush-hush," the chief of M.I.5 said to his deputy as they conducted their monthly review of Lucius' now-bulging dossier. "In any event, the Yanks haven't briefed us on him as they normally do. We'll do well to

keep an eye on the chap."

God alone knows how many man-hours were wasted as cryptanalysts pored interminably over Lucius' meticulously detailed reports to his superiors in Grand Rapids. His code was never broken because it didn't exist, but the conviction remained unshakable that his glowing descriptions of the potential markets to be exploited in such places as Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, and Copenhagen concealed a wealth of secret information. One consequence of this was that all over the world, the holders of New American Standard Sewing Machine franchises were added to the lists of people to be rounded up in the event of a national emergency.

Of all this, Lucius remained blissfully unaware. Sometimes his bags were not precisely as he had left them on departing from his hotel room, but this was only to be expected of foreign chambermaids. Frequently his sales research reports were long delayed in arriving in Grand Rapids, but foreign postal services, Lucius knew from long experience, often left much to be desired.

Sometimes, too, he had the feeling that somebody was following him, and on such occasions he transferred his wallet from his hip pocket to

his inner breast pocket. No point in making it easier for a thief.

He was in his hotel room in Toulon when he received the first of what became a series of inexplicable callers.

"Monsieur Mercier, our dealer here, advises excellent prospects for the new Astra De Luxe model," Lucius was writing when his phone rang. The desk clerk asked whether he would receive a Monsieur Gerstenstein. Of course, replied Lucius, wondering who Monsieur Gerstenstein was.

Monsieur Gerstenstein proved to be a short plump man in a rumpled suit and with an air of quiet desperation. He was sweating freely, and the first thing he did on entering Lucius' room was to walk swiftly to one side of the French windows and peer nervously in both directions along the street.

"If it's a dealership you want to discuss, I'm very much afraid that the Toulon franchise has already been assigned," Lucius said politely—he was always polite, but he made a mental note that Gerstenstein was not the sort of person he would want to represent New American Standard; the man was positively furtive. To his mild astonishment Monsieur Gerstenstein's pasty face broke into a knowing grin.

"They told me you were a clever one, Herr Belkamp," he said in a heavy Teutonic accent.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Ten thousand dollars, unmarked bills, to my account in the Bank of Zurich," declared Gerstenstein with finality, extracting a thick manila envelope from his coat pocket. "For this," he added, patting the envelope. "Everything—cranes, lifting capacities, machine shops, docks—the whole works, including manpower figures."

"My dear sir—"

"The French Navy itself has no more explicit plans of the Toulon dockyards, believe me, Herr Balkamp."

"The Toulon naval base?" Lucius was dumfounded, his eyes—were they brown or gray, or possibly blue—wide. "Let me assure you, sir, that I haven't the slightest use in the world for your plans. In fact, I can't possibly imagine why you should think I would."

Gerstenstein was a professional. He shrugged and returned the manila envelope to his pocket. "Ach, so. I should have known better. Of course, you already have the plans of the Toulon dockyards, so why should you pay for another set?" Gerstenstein clucked admiringly. "You Americans," he continued, shaking his head. He clicked his heels. "It has been a

pleasure meeting a master of our profession. Perhaps next time I can offer you something for which you will have a need. I expect to have the plans of the French atomic installations in the Sahara by the end of the year."

Lucius could only shake his head numbly in reply to this absurd suggestion.

"You Americans. Amazing." Gerstenstein shrugged again. "The Poles will pay only six thousand, but beggars can't be choosers, can they? *Auf wiedersehen*, Herr Belkamp."

Lucius watched the plump man leave and then returned to his report, dismissing Gerstenstein as a hopeless lunatic with some kind of dockyard fixation. Since his room was on the sixth floor of the Hôtel de la Poste he heard nothing of the incident on the street below, of a sadness unspeakable, when a large black Citroen, appearing as it were from nowhere, thundered down on Monsieur Gerstenstein, killed him dead as a mackerel, and roared away from the scene. In the ensuing commotion, a young and very clever Polish intelligence agent was able to slip the manila envelope from Gerstenstein's pocket, and thus save his government six thousand dollars, American.

"This would seem to be the

first time that Belkamp has exercised his license to kill," the head of the Deuxième Bureau noted in his own report on the death of Gerstenstein. "Not surprisingly, the police have been completely unable to establish even the slightest connection between the death and this supremely brilliant operative. More intensive surveillance is indicated."

"I should say something's building; the chap's getting a bit desperate," was the view of the chiefs of M.I.5 and M.I.6 on hearing of the affair.

"Gerstenstein was simply out of his league," was the verdict in Bonn. "Another small-time freelance up against an expert. What could he expect against Belkamp?"

A few weeks later, in Stockholm, Lucius received another caller, named Axelson, who offered to supply him with a map of Norwegian coastal minefields and navigational aids planned in the event of a Russian invasion. Once more, Lucius declined. He was becoming annoyed.

"Dammit, Axelson, I'm in the sewing machine business! What the devil would I want with a map of a bloody minefield?" Lucius had picked up more than a few criticisms from his many visits to the sceptered isle.

"You Americans," replied Herr Axelson, grinning; for he, too, was a professional. "Always one jump ahead."

Axelson was briefly lucky. The Norwegian counterintelligence officer driving the Volvo sports coupe missed him by a clean foot and was, as a result, severely reprimanded. A few weeks later, however, Axelson, a skilled and enthusiastic alpinist, was killed in a fall during a lone ascent along a route often suggested for beginners. The Norwegian counterintelligence officer subsequently received the Order of St. Olaf, second class; with oak leaves "for conspicuous services to the Crown." But that was in Oslo.

In Stockholm, once again the police could trace no connection between Lucius and the unfortunate Axelson. As was the case in France, the intensive investigation was carried out with the utmost secrecy, so Lucius was quite unaware that he was the focus of inquiry. "The Swedish market remains strong, but there are signs that a slump in over-all sales can be expected during the fourth quarter," he wrote to his superiors in Grand Rapids. "A larger advertising budget is recommended."

From Stockholm, Lucius journeyed to West Berlin. The

German competition was, he well knew, tough and well organized, but in Germany, as elsewhere, there were always a certain number of people who would buy anything with an "imported" label on it. By now his rooms were, as a matter of routine, fitted with sensitive microphones concealed in the telephones, the chandeliers, and beneath the beds. The adjacent rooms were always occupied by men with head-sets and electronic gear of exquisite precision, and they worked around the clock.

Lucius always enjoyed his visits to West Berlin. There was a gaiety to the place, mixed with an exhilarating sense of danger, emphasized by the grim wall dividing the city. A sense of hazard and adventure invariably filled him when his train passed through the Russian Zone from West Germany, relieving him for a few hours of the essential, albeit admittedly dull business of estimating the market for sewing machines. He enjoyed visiting the night clubs, and treated himself to the best restaurants.

But this time, he felt, things were not quite the same. Nothing he could put his finger on, nothing tangible, just the vague feeling that something was not quite right.

Why, for example, had that

beautiful blonde night-club hostess practically thrown herself at his head on that first evening in town after a day spent with Herr Hentschel, the West Berlin distributor for New American Standard? Lucius was well aware that he was not especially attractive to women, but the voluptuous blonde who had joined him, uninvited, at his table had as much as suggested that she return to his hotel room with him. Why she should have been so deeply interested in his recent travels was not clear. Nor was the reason for her inscrutable smile whenever he mentioned sewing machines.

"Ahv gorse, dahlink," she kept saying. She was, she said, a Hungarian refugee and her name was Irena Betenyi. She did not mention that she was also a second lieutenant of the KGB.

But she had been very attractive, Lucius thought the next morning as he brushed his teeth. Musing thus, he reached for his bottle of mouth wash, only to have it slip from his grasp and crash to the floor.

"Damn!" said Lucius, and wondered that he had never noticed that his mouth wash had a curious fragrance, like vanilla, say, or no—almonds, that was it, almonds.

In her flat Lieutenant

Betenyi rued her need for haste the previous evening. Making the switch, she hadn't tightened the cap on Lucius' bottle properly and now her best evening bag was a soppy mess.

Then, too, there had been that close call. Most of the war damage had been long since cleaned up, but almost every day some hitherto unknown weakness showed itself in the surviving structures. Another foot, Lucius pondered to himself, and I would have been under that heavy chunk of falling cornice.

No, there was something not quite right about this West Berlin visit.

What Lucius did not know was that SMERSH was under orders to kill him.

It was bound to happen in the long run.

And finally it brought him to the attention of the Central Intelligence Agency, thanks to yet another bit of Lucius' perennially bad luck, yet another of those odd-ball accidents. This one took place in Hong Kong.

"My congratulations," the chief of British intelligence was telling his C.I.A. opposite number as they sat over a sundowner in their mutual club. "I see your man Belkamp finally got Subaroff."

"Our man Belkamp? We've

got no Belkamp, my dear chap."

"Come now, old boy. You know very well that Ding How Chee, who says he's the Hong Kong distributor for some make of sewing machine, is really a part of the Belkamp Apparatus. Well, for your information, revered colleague, as I was walking to the club I passed a nasty accident. Poor old Subaroff had been hit by one of Ding How Chee's delivery vans. Dead as a doornail. I wonder who they'll send to replace him. In his own way he was rather a decent sort for a Russian." The Englishman sighed. "But those are the risks we station chiefs must take, I'm afraid."

"My God," said his American friend, "I shouldn't care to be in this fellow Belkamp's shoes. If they've put SMERSH on him, there's not a thing that can be done to save him. Tell me more."

"Are you serious? He really isn't one of your people?"

"Never more serious in my life, old friend."

By the next day the Central Intelligence Agency knew all that the British knew about the Belkamp Apparatus.

"Clearly," the director was telling his first deputy, "the operation is enormous, and purely mercenary. So far as I am concerned, Belkamp is a

renegade. But who's he working for? And why should we try to protect him? Maybe it's just as well he is put out of the way."

"Of course, it will appear accidental."

"Of course," said the director. "In the meantime initiate a dossier. I doubt it will be a long one."

Originally Lucius had planned to spend a week in West Berlin, but his increasing unease made him decide to cut short his visit and proceed to Madrid, one of his fastest-growing sales regions. The new Astra De Luxe model, with its special hemstitching attachment, should go over big in Madrid, although he could wish for a dealer with a little more get-up-and-go. Señor Morales y Varga was a great believer in the siesta.

He telephoned the hotel desk and asked the clerk to reserve a seat for him on the Thursday morning plane from West Berlin to Paris and Madrid, first class. The company was most generous in its travel allowances.

The SMERSH chief for West Berlin had been reluctant to accept the coded instructions he had received from Moscow. Why not, he had demanded, pick Belkamp up, rather than simply eliminate him? Under expert questioning he would

surely reveal all there was to know about his organization.

"Every intelligence agency in the world has attempted to infiltrate the Belkamp Apparatus and failed," came back the reply. "Until now he has killed only his own people. He has struck us once; he will surely strike again. Carry out previous instructions."

So Lieutenant Betenyi had been assigned and the heavy cornice had fallen.

"What next?" asked the crestfallen SMERSH operative who had worked for some hours in the cold darkness before dawn at weakening the cornice. "The old hit-and-run bit?"

"Too obvious, Brodski," his chief had answered worriedly. "It would alert his second-in-command and the whole operation would dive underground. At least now we know where they are. The important thing is to make it look natural."

"And now he's off to Madrid. I'd hate to blow up a whole planeload of people, Chief."

"I say let's pass the whole thing over to Madrid. They have a hell of a lot of accidents in Madrid and the Spaniards are a hot-tempered bunch."

"You want me to give it one more try, Chief?"

"Okay, one more. Otherwise leave it to Madrid."

But the hypodermic needle never got through the close-packed plastic credit cards in Lucius' wallet, which he had placed in his breast pocket, feeling that he was being followed again as he walked through the crowded streets to his West Berlin dealer's showrooms. He was quite unable to figure out, though, why the inside of his wallet should have become filled with some kind of transparent, sticky fluid. Curiously enough, it also smelled a lot like his mouth wash.

The Wednesday evening before his flight, Lucius treated himself to an excellent dinner. Now that he was on the point of leaving, West Berlin seemed to have regained its charm and he was mildly sorry that he would have to spend this last night in his room, composing his report to the home office. He saw little hope that Herr Hentschel's volume of sales would show any appreciable growth, but there was no doubt that as an advertising gesture, the West Berlin showroom was worth supporting, especially if New American Standard diversified further in the field of home appliances.

"There appears to be a growing demand for the re-

chargeable electric toothbrush," he was writing in his precise hand when, very quietly, the door of his room opened and a tall handsome young man, dressed very roughly, stepped inside and shut the door softly behind him.

"What the hell?" Lucius demanded angrily, rising from his desk. "Don't you people ever knock?"

"Herr Belkamp?"

"That's right. Lucius J. Belkamp, and what I want to know is just what the hell you think you're doing here."

"*Gott sei dank,*" muttered the young man, and collapsed wearily into one of the room's two armchairs. "I was afraid I would be too late," he continued in excellent English. "Permit me to introduce myself, if you won't mind my not rising."

"Not in the least," replied Lucius, coming as close to irony as he ever did.

"Kronau, Konrad, Colonel. You will, I am certain, have heard of me."

"Why on earth should I have heard of you?"

The handsome young man's smile was as weary as the rest of him. "Please, Herr Belkamp. The time for discretion is past—it is no longer necessary for you to pretend that you have not heard of Colonel

Kronau, the deputy chief of intelligence of the Army of the East German People's Republic. Certainly, we have heard of you."

"You have?" Lucius was genuinely taken aback, and slightly frightened. He had absolutely no desire to engage the attentions of anyone beyond that bleak wall cutting through Berlin.

In the room's adjacent, two teams of men tensed over their listening equipment.

"Well, you have your own methods, so I won't press the issue," Colonel Kronau said. He produced a manila folder, of the sort with which Lucius was becoming painfully familiar, from the inside of his leather jacket and extended it wordlessly to Lucius. "All yours, mein Herr. The Russian order of battle and our own. Artillery positions and munitions dumps. Airfields. You must get it to your chiefs in Washington, Herr Belkamp. It is priceless."

"Me? Washington? Look, Colonel, my next stop is Madrid. What in God's name would I do with this stuff? I don't know what's been going on lately, but if you want to peddle this, why don't you go to our Embassy in Bonn?"

"Because we know you are the C.I.A.'s top man in Europe, maybe in the whole world, but

I have no time to argue. Look, Herr Belkamp, I haven't a hope of getting back alive, and when they discover I've defected, this place won't be safe for me for three seconds. I'm not asking you for help or money. Just get this to Washington."

"The C.I.A.'s top man in Europe?" Lucius repeated numbly, and then the enormity of it broke over him. He sank back into the chair by the desk, his knees turned to gelatin. This stranger was making a hideous mistake!

Konrad Kronau, Colonel, pushed himself to his feet and tossed the manila envelope onto the bed. His heels came together smartly as he bowed, ramrod stiff, from the hips. "And now I have done what I set out to do fifteen years ago. The Russians will remember Konrad Kronau to their sorrow. Now, Herr Belkamp, I shall take the liberty to disappear. A plane is waiting to take me to Sweden. It has been an honor to meet you, sir."

As silently as he had come, the Colonel took his departure, having struck his blow for whatever it was he was striking for. Lucius was never to know.

He had no idea what Kronau had given him. Too young to have served in World War II, he was already in Europe for New American Standard when the

Korean conflict began and sputtered to its end. Nor was Lucius a reader of fiction; being a great believer in self-improvement, he stuck to nonfiction. But clearly the Colonel had set great store by the contents of his envelope.

Equally clear, Lucius realized, so would their rightful owners. He had read enough to know that if the envelope were found in his possession, he stood an excellent chance of being shot as a spy. On the other hand, Kronau's absurd statement that he, Lucius J. Belkamp, was the C.I.A.'s top man in Europe was a strong indication that the poor fellow had come unhinged, perhaps by his experience in defection, if he had, in fact, defected in the first place. That was it, obviously; the man had gone off his rocker, like that peculiar fat man in Toulon. There seemed to be a lot of it going on—especially around Lucius.

Soothed by this explanation, Lucius reasoned that the night's fantastic events were no cause to interfere with his employer's business. Perhaps the envelope really had some value. The most logical course would be to deliver it to the American Embassy in Madrid and let them deal with it.

Having reached this conclusion, Lucius stuffed the en-

velope into his suitcase and retired for an unbroken night's sleep, grateful that his own mental health was sound, untroubled except for the thought that he was going to look pretty ridiculous walking into the Embassy in Madrid and asking them to forward an envelope to Washington.

Not only look but feel an utter fool, Lucius decided two days later as he walked up the imposing steps of the United States Embassy in Madrid. He would have delivered his envelope immediately on his arrival, but Señor Morales y Varga had gone to the trouble of meeting him at the airport and then insisting on one of those prolonged Spanish dinners. Lucius had felt it would be rude to decline. They were some distance from the airport when the faulty fuse of the bomb planted aboard Lucius' plane went off.

"Mr. Lucius Belkamp to see anybody who would be likely to know anything about the C.I.A.," he told the receptionist in the Embassy courteously, hoping she wouldn't mistake him for some sort of crank. He had given one of his business cards to avoid such an impression.

"It was one of the damnedest moments of my life," the C.I.A.'s station chief in Madrid

was to tell his superiors later. "The head of the Belkamp Apparatus—Lucius Belkamp himself!—walking right into my office, as cool as you please, with a SMERSH death sentence on his head. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this plain, ordinary business type in a gray flannel suit—or was it brown? So anyhow, he has the indescribable gall to say, ever so casually, that he's got an envelope which might be useful to us. Useful! My God, when I got a look at what was in that envelope!"

"How he succeeded in getting Kronau to defect we'll probably never know," said the deputy charged with reviewing the Belkamp affair. "Nor how he has so far succeeded in keeping out of harm's way."

"They'll never get him. The man's luck and audacity are beyond belief."

"I don't suppose you approached him on the possibility of giving up his independent operation and coming to work for us?"

"You know Belkamp. I did hint at it, but he stared me straight in the eye and said he was in the sewing machine game. He looked as if he thought I was crazy or something. So no dice. He's strictly a loner." There was an undisguised tone of admiration

in the station chief's voice.

"And you say he plans to return to this country?"

"That's correct. In fact, he's there now, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His story is that there's some kind of sales meeting to promote something called the Astra De Luxe. With hemstitching attachment."

The deputy grinned shrewdly as he reached for his telephone. "Yeah, sure. Just the same, let's not take any chances. Operator? Put me on the scrambler to the F.B.I.—"

And in Grand Rapids, Mich., Mr. Elwood Sprenkle, President of the New American Standard Sewing Machine Company, was welcoming Lucius Belkamp back home again. "Nice to have you back, Lucius, and this time it's for good. I'm promoting you to vice president of our new Home Appliances Division, with offices here. Meantime I hope you'll tell the boys what our European customers want. How was this last swing of yours, anyhow?"

"Very quiet, really," Lucius replied, flattered by all the attention the president of the company was giving him, and delighted by his promotion. It was nice to be back home in Grand Rapids where you didn't run into all kinds of nuts and where your mouth wash smelled like a mouth wash should.

# Harry Kemelman

## The Adelphi Bowl

*Another masterly study in the art of deduction and featuring the Snowden Professor of English Literature, Nicholas (Nicky) Welt—demonstrating again how one simple, apparently trivial fact leads, by inexorable logic, to the solution of a not-so-simple crime... by the creator of Rabbi David Small...*

### Detective: NICKY WELT

I was fully prepared to spend the week or ten days that it would take to redecorate my house at a hotel, but when I mentioned it to Nicky and he suggested that I stay with him instead, I was curiously touched and readily accepted. Nicky—Nicholas Welt, Snowden Professor of English Literature at the University—was only a few years older than I, but his lined, gnome-like face and his prematurely snow-white hair—my own was just beginning to turn gray at the temples—made him seem much older.

Nicky treated me as very much his junior, usually with the touch of condescension a teacher has for a not-over-bright sophomore, and I willingly fell into the role assigned me. It has been that way from the

beginning of our friendship, when I had first joined the law faculty, and it continued even after I gave up teaching to campaign—successfully—for the office of County Attorney.

The Professor lived in a boarding house a couple of blocks from the railroad depot at some little distance from the University, a circumstance which from his point of view was one of the virtues of the place since it gave him a brisk fifteen-minute constitutional every day, and also cut down on the number of people who might be likely to drop in on him of an evening had he been nearer. He occupied a small suite on the second floor consisting of bedroom, study, and bath, and either by reason of his seniority at the boarding

house—he had lived there all the time I've known him—or by reason of his academic eminence (in a university town that is important), he was the star boarder.

Mrs. Keefe, his landlady, was always doing special little things for him, such as bringing up a tray with cake and coffee in the evening, and this in spite of his having an electric hot plate in his room, as did all the rooms in the establishment, and being capable of doing for himself. Obviously, she offered no objection to my coming there. In fact, it was all Nicky could do to prevent her from removing the cot in the study and bringing in a full-sized bed.

As it turned out, I was fortunate in the arrangement, for a portion of that period of ten days coincided with a University Convocation. We had had convocations before, and they had disturbed the even flow of university life but little; but this year the University had a new president—one of the new type of college presidents, a young, eager, efficient executive—and he had arranged for scholars and bigwigs to be brought from the ends of the earth.

There were meetings and conferences and panel discussions scheduled for every hour for each of the three days. But

what is more to the purpose, every hotel room in town, every bit of available dormitory space, seemingly every unoccupied bed, had been commandeered by the University for the expected distinguished guests.

If I had gone to a hotel, I probably would have had to share my room with one or more of the visitors. And if I had remained in my own house, I would have been in a worse case—the unwilling host of a dozen or more. As it was, Professor Richardson, who was chairman of the Committee on Housing Arrangements, gave me a reproachful look when I ran across him at the Faculty Club, and practically implied that I had purposely arranged to have my house decorated during Convocation Week just to avoid having to entertain guests of the University.

Mrs. Keefe, on the other hand, like all the other boarding-house proprietors, was naturally delighted. She had a room up in the attic which she rarely succeeded in renting, into which she now managed to crowd three young women from India who were to take part in the discussions on Village Medicine. She had coaxed or browbeaten the amiable young graduate student who had the room immediately

above ours to share his room with a bearded Pakistani in a turban. The room across the hall from us was occupied by another graduate student who had been called home because of sickness in the family, and she had promptly rented it, presumably with his permission, to two of the visitors, one of whom arrived Sunday and the other the following day by the evening train.

Later that evening, after the two men across the hall had had a chance to get settled, Nicky knocked on their door and invited them to spend the evening with us. I am sure that he was moved as much by curiosity as he was by feelings of hospitality. The earlier arrival was a young man of about thirty, tall and blond, with a charming mid-European accent and the impossible name of Erik Flugelheimer. He was lively and vivacious, and yet he had a humility that was not the least part of his charm.

His roommate was a short dark man, perhaps ten years older, whose name was Earl Blodgett. He was stuffy and pompous and quite convinced of his own importance. He turned out to be none other than the assistant curator of the Far East Division of the Laurence Winthrop Collection. Since the theme of the

Convocation was, as the program leaflet gave it, "The New World of the Far East," his importance in the general scheme of things was obvious. He was also precise, meticulous, and crotchety.

When Nicky set about preparing coffee for our guests, Blodgett said, "I'm afraid I can't. It keeps me awake till all hours. Might I have some tea instead? Do you have a kettle? If not, I can get the one from our room."

Nicky assured him that he had tea and a kettle and was about to prepare it when Blodgett begged leave to prepare it himself. "I am very particular as to just how it is brewed. I'm sure you won't mind."

Nicky did mind, of course, but he was a gracious host and motioned his guest to the hot plate.

Erik laughed. "He cannot abide coffee and I can't stand tea. We have both a teapot and a percolator but we have only one burner on our hot plate. We shall have to toss a coin to decide who will make his drink first in the morning."

We sipped at our drinks and talked about the scheduled events. I remarked that the emphasis seemed to be primarily political and sociological and for that reason there might not

be too much interest in the Art Section meetings.

"I have every reason to believe," Blodgett said with lofty complacency, "that the Art Section will provide the most noteworthy contribution of the Convocation."

"Are you planning a surprise of some sort?" I asked.

Blodgett gave me a superior smile. "Have you ever heard of the Adelphi Bowl?" he asked.

Nicky pricked up his ears. "George Slocumbe, the Fine Arts man here, was telling me about it just the other day. He said it had recently been acquired by a private collection. He didn't mention the Laurence Winthrop Collection. Do you mean that you have it and are planning to exhibit it here?"

"What is it, Nicky?" I asked.

"It's a bowl made of massive gold and encrusted with precious stones. It's worth—"

"It is priceless," said Blodgett.

"And you are going to exhibit it here at the Convocation?" I asked.

Blodgett shrugged. "Perhaps."

Rather than press him, I turned to his roommate. "And you, are you going to surprise the Convocation, too?"

The blond young man shook his head ruefully. "I am not a distinguished scholar like my

roommate. I am an instructor of mathematics at Muhlbach College in North Dakota. Have you ever heard of it? Ah, I thought not. It is a small denominational college where once a year the Minneapolis Symphony gives a concert and maybe two or three times a year we get a road company with the New York hits of three years ago. So when notice of your Convocation was posted on the bulletin board and I saw that it would come during our April vacation, I decided to come here. I shall attend as many sessions as I can. Who knows, I might get to ask an intelligent question and this might call me to the attention of one of your distinguished guests from one of the larger colleges who might decide that I might make a worthwhile addition to his faculty and rescue me from Muhlbach."

The Convocation was scheduled to last three days—Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Blodgett's talk was scheduled for Wednesday evening. He chose to regard the scheduling as indicative of the importance of his talk, as though the Convocation was arranged to work up to a climax. Under the circumstances, I did not have the heart to point out that since the evening train left about an hour

before his discourse, the likelihood was that the great majority of the guests would have left the University by the time he was scheduled to speak.

The next day, Tuesday, I left my office early—just after lunch, in fact. It was too nice a day to work. I strolled along leisurely, savoring the April air, choosing the long way back to the boarding house—through the campus. I saw Earl Blodgett and stopped to talk with him. I invited him to join me back to the house, but he was planning to take in some of the lectures, so I left him.

Just as I arrived at the boarding house, I saw Erik turn the corner. I waited for him and we walked up the front stairs together. The mail had just been delivered and was lying in a pile on the hall table. I checked the letters to see if there was anything for me or for Nicky.

"I don't suppose there is anything for me," Erik said.

"Here's one for your roommate though," and I handed him an envelope.

Included in the mail were a couple of magazines and I glanced through them idly while Erik went up to his room. Nicky was at his desk in the study, correcting student blue books, when I entered.

"Are you planning to go to

the Convocation Dinner tonight?" I asked.

He gave me a sour grin. "I went to the Convocation Luncheon this noon," he said. "That's about as much Convocation eating as I can stand for awhile. I can forgive the gelatinous creamed chicken in a soggy pastry shell since that's standard, but the conversation at these affairs is a little more difficult on the digestion. There were two females, one on either side of me, who were conversing largely across me and talking the most utter drivel. One urged with all seriousness that mirrored in every leaf or bud there is the clue to the entire cosmos. I am not unfamiliar with the more insane of the transcendentalists, but I don't believe any of them ever really believed the nonsense as a purely practical matter—that is, that one could determine, for example, the speed of the earth's rotation by studying the leaf of a tree."

"And you think your luncheon companion did?"

"Well, she had been in India, and she had been taken to all the tourist traps—the usual guru—and this one was able to take a single hair from a man's head and tell all about him. Another thing that he did: he had himself blindfolded and he had one of the company—there

were about twenty, as I understand—pluck a single note on a native harp, and then he was able to tell which of the twenty had struck the note."

"That's rather hard to believe, of course, but I once spoke to a concert pianist who told me that if he and Rubinstein both struck the same key on the same piano, there would be a distinct difference in sound that would be apparent to anyone."

"Nonsense," said Nicky decisively.

At that moment the quiet of our boarding house was broken by the shrill hoarse whistle of our neighbor's teakettle. Nicky is so positive in his opinions that the chance of scoring on him was irresistible. I appeared to be listening intently for a moment, then I said, "I am not so sure, Nicky. Now I would be willing to wager that the discordant note of that teakettle shows the fine Middle-European hand of our friend Erik, rather than the restrained, repressed character of the excellent Blodgett."

"Then you would lose," said Nicky with a wry grin, "because it is Earl Blodgett who is the tea drinker. Erik drinks coffee."

I rattled the loose coins in my trouser pocket. "I am still willing to make the wager," I said smugly.

Nicky peered out at me from under his bushy eyebrows. "You are too certain," he said. "You must know something. Did you meet Erik on the stairs and did he tell you that his roommate was not in?"

I nodded sheepishly. "Something like that. I met Earl at the University and he said he was staying for some lectures. Erik came in with me. I stopped to look through the mail. There was a letter for Earl which I gave him to take up. I assume that Earl didn't change his mind about the lectures and that Erik must be in the room alone. I suppose he decided to try the tea for once just to see what Earl finds in the stuff."

Nicky had turned back to his blue books even while I was talking. Without looking up, he said, "The whistling of a teakettle does not mean that our friend is brewing tea, only that he is boiling water."

"Why else would he boil water?"

"There are any number of reasons he might have for boiling water. He might even be interested not in the water but in the by-product."

"What's the by-product of boiling water?" I demanded.

"Steam."

"Steam? What would he want with steam?"

Nicky put his pile of blue

books away and looked up at me. "He might want it for loosening the-gummed flap on an envelope."

"You think he is opening Blodgett's letter? Why would he want to read Blodgett's mail?"

Nicky sat back in his chair. "Let's think about it. Of course, he might be an extremely inquisitive person who finds anything that is closed a challenge to his curiosity. But that's not too likely. It is also most unlikely that he knows anyone who would be apt to be writing to Blodgett. That suggests that there is something about the sealed envelope that indicated that it would be worth his while to open it."

I fell into the spirit of the game. "You mean he could tell something from the handwriting or the return address?"

"That's a possibility," said Nicky, "but that would mean that the address was in Blodgett's own handwriting."

"How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Well, consider the two men. Blodgett and Erik are engaged in entirely different fields of study; they come from utterly different backgrounds, and from widely separated parts of the country. It is unlikely they have any friends or acquaintances- in common. The only

handwriting that he might be familiar with would be Blodgett's, from having seen his notes lying about perhaps. It is possible that alone might excite his curiosity; what is Blodgett writing to himself? But what I had in mind was that the mere *feel* of the envelope might lead him to want to open it."

"You mean it might contain money—say, bills of large denomination?"

Nicky shook his head. "They would feel just like any other paper. If it were heavy—"

"Like a coin," I exclaimed, having in mind a rare antique.

"Possible, but not reasonable. If it were a coin of great value, he would be fairly certain to see it when Blodgett opened his letter—if he only wanted to see it. On the other hand, if he wanted to steal it, he would not bother to steam the envelope open, he would merely take the envelope. Sooner or later, however, the theft would be discovered and investigation would prove that Erik must have taken it. No, I would say that line of reasoning is not too fertile. I am inclined to agree that the envelope contained something that could be felt, probably metal, necessarily flat. But I rather think that it would be something that has no great value in itself. A key, for instance."

"A woman—"

Nicky smiled. "You are incurably romantic. You were about to suggest that some woman had sent Blodgett a key to her apartment for an assignation. Somehow our friend Blodgett doesn't seem the type. And why would Erik be interested in his roommate's amours? No, no, a locker key is more likely than a house key." Nicky nodded his head vigorously. "Yes, a locker key is the most likely thing. And a locker key implies something small—at least, portable—and probably valuable."

"But where would Blodgett get a locker key?"

"Just as anyone else would obtain it. Consider: he gets off the train in a strange town. It is dark and he is going to a boarding house, not a hotel with a safe, mind you. What more natural than to put the valuable object he is carrying into one of the lockers at the depot?"

I nodded thoughtfully.

"Now we have to rely on our imagination. Why didn't he just pocket the key instead of enclosing it in an envelope and addressing it to himself here at the boarding house?" Nicky shrugged. "He is a nervous, edgy sort of man. Perhaps just as he finished putting the object away, he noticed someone watching him, or thought he

noticed someone. Just putting the object away in a locker would not do much to insure its safety if a few minutes after leaving the depot he were waylaid and robbed of the key."

"He could have taken a cab at the station," I objected.

"Monday night? With dozens of strangers coming into town and only one full-time cab available? He probably asked for a cab and was told there was none. Then he in turn was asked where he was going. When he tells them his destination is the Keefe House, he learns, perhaps for the first time, that it is a boarding house, rather than a hotel. And his informant goes on to tell him that it is only a couple of blocks away and he can easily walk it."

"All right, I'll grant you that he might have been nervous and thought someone was watching him, but—"

"And I should like to point out," Nicky cut in, "that seeing the envelope addressed to Blodgett in Blodgett's own handwriting, and postmarked yesterday from this very town, in conjunction with the feel of the key—all that would set our friend Erik thinking precisely along these lines."

"But hang it all, Nicky, why does it have to be a valuable

object? It could be that he had two suitcases and didn't feel up to carrying both, especially if he were going to walk. What more natural than to put one in a locker and carry the other, the one that contains his shaving kit?"

"He's only going to be here for a couple of days. Two bags are most unlikely. Besides, if it were only a suitcase that contained a change of underwear and a couple of extra shirts, he would not bother to mail himself the key. He would just pocket it."

"I suppose you are suggesting that it is the Adelphi Bowl that he left in the locker. What did he say it was worth?"

Nicky nodded with relish. "He didn't—except to say that it was priceless. Of course, what he had in mind was that it was unique and hence no price could be set on it. But even if it were broken up, I fancy the gold and the gems would come to many thousands of dollars."

"Dammitall, Nicky, a man doesn't go lugging something like that around with him and then leave it in a railroad locker."

"Why not?" Nicky demanded. "If it's small and portable, what better way of transporting it from one place to another than by carrying it? I imagine it has its own fitted

case with a handle and looks like an overnight bag. Is it your idea that it should be transported in an armored car with a guard? That *would* be dangerous. It would be alerting every thief in the area. It's natural for you to think that way since your work does not call for handling valuable objects. But those who normally do are a lot more matter-of-fact about it. I knew a diamond merchant who used to travel about a great deal. He carried a fortune in unmounted stones in little folds of paper—parcels he called them—and these he simply carried in a wallet in his inside breast pocket."

"Then your idea is that Erik sees an envelope addressed by Blodgett to himself—"

"And postmarked from here," Nicky interjected.

"All right, and postmarked from here, and he feels a key inside it; and knowing that Blodgett is going to display the Adelphi Bowl he comes to the same conclusion that you have—that it is at present resting in a locker in our modest little depot, instead of in the Bursar's safe at the University, having been previously sent down by the museum authorities."

"Precisely."

"Then why does he bother to steam open the envelope?" I

asked triumphantly. "Why doesn't he just tear it open, take out the key, go down to the depot, and get it? Or isn't he as sure as you are and intends to examine the contents of the locker first and then if it is not the Bowl, seal the key up in the envelope again?"

"No, no," said Nicky testily. "He's sure enough; but he can't just go down there and take it. For one thing, there's no train out of here at this time. For another, Blodgett will miss the letter. We know it came in. Suspicion would point—suspicion? No, certainty would point to Erik. And how far do you suppose he would get? Look there."

He was standing near the window and I joined him there. On the sidewalk just beneath our windows stood Erik. He looked quickly in either direction, and then with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, for there was still a bite in the air, he turned to the right and headed toward the depot at a brisk walk.

Nicky turned away. "No danger," he said. "He will go down to the depot and deposit a quarter in one of the lockers and put the key to that locker in the envelope. No, he won't. Blodgett might remember the location of his locker. He'll remove the Bowl from Blod-

gett's locker to another and then put the original key back in the envelope."

"And what should we do about it?" I asked. "Call the police and have them—"

"Call the police?" Nicky stared at me in disbelief. "For what?" he demanded. "Because a young man chooses to boil some water in order to make a cup of instant coffee rather than go to the trouble of preparing a percolator?"

"But going down to the depot—"

"To get a timetable, I imagine."

It suddenly came to me that I had been had, that Nicky was merely paying me back for my foolish little wager, and that indeed nothing had happened except that Erik had boiled a kettle of water.

Nevertheless, I was uneasy, and the next morning, after Nicky had left, I called my office to tell them that I would not be in that day. I sat near the window where I could command a view of the street. Shortly after ten, I saw Erik leave and head for the University.

I put on my topcoat and followed him, keeping about a block behind him, but being careful to keep him in sight all the time. As we approached the University, I quickened my

pace and drew nearer so as not to lose him in the crowd.

I kept Erik in sight all morning. When he went into a meeting room and took a seat in front, I followed and found a seat in the rear. At noon I saw him enter the cafeteria and only then did I leave him and head for home. Nicky was in the room when I arrived.

"Didn't you go to your office today?" he asked with a little smirk of amusement on his vinegary face.

"No, I didn't," I said shortly.

I took a seat near the window and stared moodily at the street below while Nicky continued the perusal of his interminable blue books. Presently I saw Erik striding along and a moment later I heard him taking the steps two at a time. He was evidently in high spirits. We could hear him moving around in his room and I assumed he was packing.

A quarter of an hour later he knocked at our door. "I'm so glad you're both in," he said. "I am leaving now. I'm taking the one-thirty out. It was nice meeting you."

"We'll walk you down to the depot," said Nicky. "There'll be quite a few leaving on this train. I ought to say goodbye to some of them."

"And did you profit from

the Convocation?" Nicky asked as we walked along.

The young man grinned. "I had one offer of a job," he said, "but it's in India."

Although we were early, there were quite a number already at the depot waiting for the train. We stood there, engaged in desultory conversation. A number of people whom we had met nodded to us and one or two came over to shake hands and say goodbye.

It was while we were thus engaged that Erik drifted away toward the news counter. He purchased a magazine to read on the train and then sauntered on to the bank of lockers just beyond. I was about to follow him when Nicky signaled me to remain where I was. Then he followed him.

The train pulled in and the crowd surged forward to get on. I waited, wondering what was happening. Finally the conductor shouted, "All aboard," and it was only then that I saw Erik, running to get aboard the train. I was about to intercept him when I saw Nicky. He was sauntering and looked smug and self-satisfied.

"Well?" I demanded.

For answer Nicky held out his hand and there was a locker key on his upraised palm.

"What did he say?"

"I asked him for the key and

he saw that I knew," said Nicky. "He asked me if someone had seen him, and I said, 'No, but I heard you boiling up some water.' Then he gave me the key."

"Now what?" I asked.

"I think as County Attorney you ought to have enough influence with the stationmaster or whoever is in charge here to open Locker 518 so that we can put the Bowl back in it."

As we walked toward the boarding house, I said, "Do you think we were right in letting him go, Nicky? After all, we are compounding a felony."

"Would it have been better if it had all been made public and the University were involved in a scandal, not to mention that Blodgett would lose his job?"

I did not press the matter.

When we got back to the boarding house, Blodgett was there. "I guess I missed Erik," he said. "I planned to get back in time to see him off, but there were some last-minute arrangements that I had to make for my paper tonight."

"Has the Bowl arrived yet?" asked Nicky gravely.

"Arrived? Why I brought it with me. I checked it in one of the lockers at the railroad station."

"At the railroad station?"

Blodgett laughed. "It's quite safe, I assure you. By far the best place. I'll pick it up on my way and then cab over to the University. Will you be coming to the meeting tonight?"

"We have an engagement," said Nicky. "But we'll try to get in, if only for a few minutes."

We did not go to the meeting. Instead, we spent the evening playing chess at the Faculty Club. By this time most of the visitors had gone and the place was quiet and peaceful. At nine o'clock Professor Richardson came in. There had been photographs and he was carrying his academic gown and hood in the crook of his arm. He sat down heavily.

"Thank God that's over," he said.

"Successful Convocation, Professor?" I asked.

"All right, I guess, as these things go," he said. "Of course, Prex would have liked a little more publicity than we got. I gather he would have liked something really dramatic to make headlines—a murder perhaps, or the theft of the University uranium supply."

"You should have told us earlier," said Nicky, "we might have arranged it."

# Ellery Queen

## A Matter of Seconds

*How Ellery played a strictly unofficial role just before Kid Bolo was to step into the ring and meet the Champ in the first \$1,000,000 fight west of Chicago . . .*

### Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

You don't have to be a fight expert to recall what happened in the ring that wild night the Champ fought Billy (the Kid) Bolo. Fans are still talking about how it put Wickenup, Colorado, on the map. But the odds are you've never heard how close that fight came to not being fought.

You remember how Wickenup got the match in the first place. The delegation from the Wickenup Chamber of Commerce, headed by millionaire cattleman Sam Pugh, trooped into the promoter's New York office, plunked down a seating plan of the new Wickenup Natural Amphitheater—capacity 75,000—and a satchel containing a guarantee of \$250,000 cash money, and flew back home with a contract for what turned out to be—figuring the TV, radio, and movie take—the first million-dollar gate west of

Chicago in the history of boxing.

It promised to be a real wingding, too, well worth any sport's investment. Both fighters were rough, tough and indestructible, their orthodox style carrying no surprises except in the sudden-death department. Anything could happen from a one-round knockout to a hospital bed for two.

The Champ trained at the Wickenup Country Club and Billy the Kid at the big Pugh ranch, and days before the fight every motel, trailer camp, and tepee within three hundred miles was hanging out the *No Vacancy* sign. Wickenup became the Eldorado of every fight fan, sportswriter, gambler, and grifter between Key West and Puget Sound who could scare up a grubstake.

Ellery was in Wickenup to see

the contest as the guest of old Sam Pugh, who owed him something for a reason that's another story.

The fight was scheduled for 8 P.M. Mountain Time, to make the 10 P.M. TV date for the Eastern fans. Ellery first heard that something was wrong exactly an hour and a half before ringtime.

He was hanging around the Comanche Bar of the Redman Hotel, waiting for his host to pick him up for the drive out to the Amphitheater, when he was paged by a bellboy.

"Mr. Queen? Mr. Pugh wants you to come up to Suite 101. Urgent."

The cattleman himself answered Ellery's knock. His purple-sage complexion looked moldy. "Come in, son!"

In the suite Ellery found the State Boxing Commissioner, nine leading citizens of Wicki-up, and Tootsie Cogan, Billy the Kid's bald little manager. Tootsie was crying, and the other gentlemen looked half inclined to join him.

"What's the matter?" asked Ellery.

"The Kid," growled Sam Pugh, "has been kidnaped."

"Snatched," wept Cogan. "At three o'clock I feed him a rare steak at Mr. Pugh's ranch and I make him lay down for a snooze. I run over for a

last-minute yak with Chick Kraus, the Champ's manager, about the rules, and while I'm gone—"

"Four masked men with guns snatched the Kid," said the cattleman. "We've been negotiating with them by phone ever since. They want a hundred thousand dollars' ransom."

"Or no fight," snarled the Boxing Commissioner. "Eastern gangsters!"

"It'll ruin us," groaned one of the local elite. "The businessmen of this town put up a quarter of a million guarantee. Not to mention the lawsuits—"

"I think I get the picture, gentlemen," said Ellery. "With the fight less than ninety minutes off, there's no time to climb a high horse. I take it you're paying?"

"We've raised the cash among us," said the old cattleman, nodding toward a bloated brief case on the table, "and, Ellery, we've told 'em that you're going to deliver it. Will you?"

"You know I will, Sam," said Ellery. "Maybe I can get a line on them at the same time—"

"No, you'll put the whammy on it!" shrieked the Kid's manager. "Just get my boy back, in shape to climb in that ring!"

"You couldn't, anyway. They're not showing their dirty faces," rasped Sam Pugh. "They've named a neutral party, too, and he's acting for them."

"What you might call a matter of seconds, eh? Who is he, Sam?"

"Know Sime Jackman, the newspaperman?"

"The dean of West Coast sportswriters? By reputation only; it's tops. Maybe if Jackman and I work together—"

"Sime's had to promise he'd keep his mouth shut," said the Boxing Commissioner, "and in the forty years I've known him, damn it, he's never broken his word. Forget the sleuthing, Mr. Queen. Just see that Billy Bolo gets back in time."

"All right," sighed Ellery. "Sam, what do I do?"

"At seven o'clock sharp," said the cattleman, "you're to be in Sime Jackman's room at the Western Hotel—Room 442. Jackman will then notify the kidnapers some way that you're there with the ransom, and Billy Bolo will be released. They've promised that the Kid will walk into this room by seven-fifteen, unharmed and ready to climb into the ring, if we keep our word."

"How do you know they'll keep theirs?"

"You're not to leave the money with Jackman till I phone you, in his room, that the Kid's back safe."

"Then you'd better give me a password, Sam—voices can be imitated. In my ear...if you gentlemen don't mind?"

A stocky man with white hair and keen blue eyes opened the door of Room 442 in the Western Hotel at Ellery's rap.

"You're Queen, I take it. Come on in. I'm Sime Jackman."

Ellery looked around while the newspaperman shut the door. On the telephone table stood a battered portable typewriter and a bottle of Scotch. There was no one else in the room.

"I think," said Ellery, "I'd like some identification."

The white-haired man stared. Then he grinned and fished in his pockets. "Driver's license—press card—you'll find my name engraved on the back of this presentation watch from the Sportswriters' Association—"

"I'm sold." Ellery opened the brief case and dumped its contents on the bed. The money was in \$1,000 bundles, marked on the bank wrappers—tens, twenties, and fifties. "Are you going to take the time to count it?"

"Hell, no. I want to see that

fight tonight!" The sportswriter went to the window.

"I was told you'd immediately notify the kidnapers."

"That's what I'm doing." Jackman raised and lowered the windowshade rapidly several times. "You don't think those lice gave me any phone numbers, do you? This is the signal I was told to give—they must have a man watching my window. I suppose he'll phone them it's okay. Well, that's that."

"Have you actually seen any of them?" Ellery asked.

"Have a heart, Queen," grinned the newspaperman. "I gave my word I wouldn't answer any questions. Well, now all we can do is wait for Sam Pugh's phone call. How about a drink?"

"I'll take a rain check." Ellery sat down on the bed beside the ransom money. "What's the *modus operandi*, Jackman? How do you get the money to them?"

But the white-haired man merely poured himself a drink. "Ought to be a pretty good scrap," he murmured.

"You win," said Ellery ruefully. "Yes, it should. How do you rate Bolo's chances? After all this, his nerves will be shot higher than Pike's Peak."

"The Kid? He was born without any. And when he gets

mad, the way he must be right now—"

"Then you think he's got a chance to take the Champ?"

"If those punks didn't sap him, it's the Kid by a K.O."

"You're the expert. You figure he's got the punch to put a bull like the Champ away?"

"Did you see the Kid's last fight?" smiled the sportswriter.

"Artie Starr's nobody's setup. Yet Bolo hit him three right hooks so fast and murderous the second and third exploded on Starr's chin while he was still on his way to the canvas. It took his handlers ten minutes to bring him to—"

The phone made them jump.

"They must have had the Kid around the corner!" Ellery said.

"You better answer it."

Ellery raced to the phone. "Queen speaking. Who is this?"

"It's me—Sam!" roared Sam Pugh's voice. "Listen, son—"

"Hold it. What's the password?"

"Oh! Solar plexus." Ellery nodded, relieved. "The Kid's back, Ellery," the cattleman exulted, "and he's all riled up and rarin' to go. Release the money. See you at ringside!" His phone clicked.

"Okay?" smiled the white-haired man.

"Yes," Ellery smiled back; "so now I can let you have it."

And, swinging the telephone receiver, Ellery clubbed him neatly above the left ear. He was over at the clothes closet yanking the door open even before the white-haired man bounced on the carpet. "So it was the closet he parked you in," Ellery said cheerfully to the trussed, gagged figure on the closet floor. "Well, we'll have you out of these ropes in a jiffy, Mr. Jackman, and then we'll settle the hash of this doublecrossing road agent!"

While the real Sime Jackman stood guard over the prostrate man, Ellery stuffed the money back into the brief case. "Hijacker?" asked the newspaperman without rancor.

"No, indeed," said Ellery. "He couldn't have been a hijacker, because the gang released the Kid after this man gave the signal. So I knew he was one of them. When they told you I was to be the contact man, you said something about you and me not knowing each other, didn't you? I thought so. That's what gave this operator his big idea. He'd put you on ice, and when I handed him the ransom thinking he was you, he'd run out on his pals."

"But how," demanded the sportswriter, "did you know he wasn't me?"

"He said in the Bolo-Starr fight the Kid flattened Starr with three right hooks. You can hardly have become the dean of West Coast sportswriters and a national fight expert, Jackman, without learning that in the lexicon of boxing there's no such blow as a right hook for a fighter with the orthodox stance. The right-hand equivalent of a left hook is a right cross."

"Why, the palooka," scowled the newspaperman, taking a fresh grip on the unconscious gangster's gun as the man stirred. "But about this ransom, Queen. I don't know what to do. After all, the rest of the gang did keep their word and return the Kid. Do I keep mine and deliver the dough to them, or does this bum's doublecross take me off the hook?"

"Hm. Nice problem in ethics." Ellery glanced at his watch and frowned. "We'll miss the fight unless we hurry! Tell you what, Sime."

"What?"

"We'll pass the buck—or should I say bucks?—to a higher authority." Ellery grinned and picked up the bruised phone. "Desk? Two reliable cops for immediate guard duty, if you please, and meanwhile get me the nearest office of the F.B.I.—rush!"

# Oscar Wilde

## Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

Here is what we wrote about this novelet in QUEEN'S QUORUM twenty-one years ago: "The significance of the murder story, 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime,' has remained virtually unrecognized for more than half a century. From an historical viewpoint, it is the precursor of that school of crime writing which the late Will Cuppy so deftly characterized as 'Murder without Tears'—stories 'which may make you smile . . . because of the matter set down, but more often by some grace of manner in the doing thereof.'

"The story concerns a series of attempted murders . . . But despite its posey estheticism, the years have not dealt unkindly with Oscar Wilde's conception of homicide-with-humor. His sparkling wit, as brilliant as it is brittle, with that faint but enduring aura of *succes de scandale*, has admirably survived not only the ravages of time but the incessant termitting of critics and the inevitable transmutations of literary fashions. Today, when we reread 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime,' we are tempted to paraphrase, though not accept, one of Oscar Wilde's most ingenious paradoxes: 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral murder. Murders are well done or badly done. That is all'; or similarly to tamper with, though this time accept, another of Oscar Wilde's aphorisms: 'All murder is quite useless.'

Now read "A Study of Duty" (the novelet's subtitle) by that notorious "litterateur . . . a long-haired, velvet-jacketed, knee-breeched eccentric who habitually wore and flaunted a single exotic flower" . . . and enjoy yourself!

It was Lady Windermere's last reception before Easter, and Bentinck House was even more crowded than usual. Six Cabinet Ministers had come on from the Speaker's Levée in their stars and ribands, all the pretty women wore their smartest dresses, and at the end of the picture gallery stood the Princess Sophia of Carlsruhe, a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds, talking bad French at the top of her voice, and laughing immoderately at everything that was said to her. It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chatted affably to violent radicals, popular preachers brushed coattails with eminent skeptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists, and it was said that at one time the supper room was absolutely crammed with geniuses. In fact, it was one of Lady Windermere's best nights, and the Princess stayed till nearly half-past eleven.

As soon as she had gone, Lady Windermere returned to the picture gallery, where a celebrated political economist was solemnly explaining the scientific theory of music to an indignant virtuoso from Hun-

gary, and began to talk to the Duchess of Paisley. She looked wonderfully beautiful with her grand ivory throat, her large blue forget-me-not eyes, and her heavy coils of golden hair. *Or pur* they were—not that pale straw color that nowadays usurps the gracious name of gold, but such gold as is woven into sunbeams or hidden in strange amber; and they gave to her face something of the frame of a saint, with not a little of the fascination of a sinner.

She was a curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion; and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband; indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages; but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ago ceased to talk scandal about her. She was now 40 years of age, childless, and with that inordinate passion for pleasure which is the secret of remaining young.

Suddenly she looked eagerly round the room, and said, in her clear contralto voice, "Where is my cheiromantist?"

"Your what, Gladys?" exclaimed the Duchess.

"My cheiromantist, Duchess. I can't live without him at present."

"Dear Gladys, you are always so original," murmured the Duchess, trying to remember what a cheiromantist really was, and hoping it was not the same as a chiropodist.

"He comes to see my hand twice a week regularly," continued Lady Windermere, "and is most interesting about it."

"Good heavens!" said the Duchess to herself. "He is a sort of chiropodist after all. How very dreadful. I hope he is a foreigner at any rate. It wouldn't be quite so bad then."

"I must certainly introduce him to you."

"Introduce him!" cried the Duchess. "You don't mean to say he is here?"—and she began looking about for a small tortoiseshell fan and a very tattered lace shawl, so as to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

"Of course he is here. I would not dream of giving a party without him. He tells me I have a pure psychic hand, and that if my thumb had been the least little bit shorter, I should have been a confirmed pessimist, and gone into a convent."

"Oh, I see!" said the Duchess, feeling very much relieved. "He tells fortunes, I suppose?"

"And misfortunes, too," answered Lady Windermere, "any amount of them. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which."

"But surely that is tempting Providence, Gladys."

"My dear Duchess, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. I think everyone should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. Now if someone doesn't go and fetch Mr. Podgers at once, I shall have to go myself."

"Let me go, Lady Windermere," said a tall handsome young man, who was standing by, listening to the conversation with an amused smile.

"Thanks so much, Lord Arthur, but I am afraid you wouldn't recognize him."

"If he is as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I couldn't well miss him. Tell me what he is like, and I'll bring him to you at once."

"Well, he is not a bit like a cheiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or

romantic-looking. He is a little, stout man, with a funny, bald head, and great gold-rimmed spectacles; something between a family doctor and a country attorney. I'm really very sorry, but it is not my fault. People are so annoying. All my pianists look exactly like poets; and all my poets look exactly like pianists; and I remember last season asking a most dreadful conspirator to dinner, a man who had blown up ever so many people, and always wore a coat of mail, and carried a dagger up his shirt-sleeve; and do you know that when he came he looked just like a nice old clergyman, and cracked jokes all the evening?

"Of course, he was very amusing, and all that, but I was awfully disappointed; and when I asked him about the coat of mail he only laughed, and said it was far too cold to wear in England. Ah, here is Mr. Podgers! Now, Mr. Podgers, I want you to tell the Duchess of Paisley's hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand, the other."

"Dear Gladys, I really don't think it is quite right," said the Duchess, feebly unbuttoning a rather soiled kid glove.

"Nothing interesting ever is," said Lady Windermere; "on *a fait le monde ainsi*. But I must introduce you. Duchess, this is

Mr. Podgers, my pet cheiromantist. Mr. Podgers, this is the Duchess of Paisley, and if you say that she has a larger mountain of the moon than I have, I will never believe in you again."

"I am sure, Gladys, there is nothing of the kind in my hand," said the Duchess gravely.

"Your Grace is quite right," said Mr. Podgers, glancing at the little fat hand with its short square fingers; "the mountain of the moon is not developed. The line of life, however, is excellent. Kindly bend the wrist. Thank you. Three distinct lines on the *rasette*! You will live to a great age, Duchess, and be extremely happy. Ambition very moderate, line of intellect not exaggerated, line of heart—"

"Now, do be indiscreet, Mr. Podgers," cried Lady Windermere.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Mr. Podgers, bowing, "if the Duchess ever had been, but I am sorry to say that I see great permanence of affection, combined with a strong sense of duty."

"Pray go on, Mr. Podgers," said the Duchess, looking quite pleased.

"Economy is not the least of your Grace's virtues," con-

tinued Mr. Podgers, and Lady Windermere went off into fits of laughter.

"Economy is a very good thing," remarked the Duchess complacently. "When I married Paisley he had eleven castles, and not a single house fit to live in."

"And now he has twelve houses, and not a single castle," cried Lady Windermere.

"Well, my dear," said the Duchess, "I like—"

"Comfort," said Mr. Podgers, "and modern improvements, and hot water in every bedroom. Your Grace is quite right. Comfort is the only thing our civilization can give us."

"You have told the Duchess's character admirably, Mr. Podgers, and now you must tell Lady Flora's"—and in answer to a nod from the smiling hostess, a tall girl, with sandy Scotch hair, and high shoulder blades, stepped awkwardly from behind the sofa, and held out a long, bony hand with spatulate fingers.

"Ah, a pianist! I see," said Mr. Podgers, "an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician. Very reserved, very honest, and with a great love of animals."

"Quite true!" exclaimed the Duchess, turning to Lady Windermere, "absolutely true! Flora keeps two dozen collie

dogs at Macloskie, and would turn our townhouse into a menagerie if her father would let her."

"Well, that is just what I do with my house every Thursday evening," cried Lady Windermere, laughing, "only I like lions better than collie dogs."

"Your one mistake, Lady Windermere," said Mr. Podgers, with a pompous bow.

"If a woman can't make her mistakes charming, she is only a female," was the answer. "But you must read some more hands for us. Come, Sir Thomas, show Mr. Podgers yours"—and a genial-looking old gentleman, in a white waistcoat, came forward, and held out a thick rugged hand, with a very long third finger.

"An adventurous nature; four long voyages in the past, and one to come. Been shipwrecked three times. No, only twice, but in danger of a shipwreck your next journey. A strong Conservative, very punctual, and with a passion for collecting curiosities. Had a severe illness between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Was left a fortune when about thirty. Great aversion to cats and Radicals."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "You must really tell my wife's hand, too."

"Your second wife's," said

Mr. Podgers quietly, still keeping Sir Thomas' hand in his. "Your second wife's. I shall be charmed." But Lady Marvel, a melancholy-looking woman, with brown hair and sentimental eyelashes, entirely declined to have her past or her future exposed; and nothing that Lady Windermere could do would induce Monsieur de Koloff, the Russian Ambassador, even to take his gloves off. In fact, many people seemed afraid to face the odd little man with his stereotyped smile, his gold spectacles, and his bright, beady eyes; and when he told poor Lady Fermor right out before everyone that she did not care a bit for music, but was extremely fond of musicians, it was generally felt that cheiromancy was a most dangerous science, and one that ought not to be encouraged, except in a *tete-a-tete*.

Lord Arthur Savile, however, who did not know anything about Lady Fermor's unfortunate story, and who had been watching Mr. Podgers with a great deal of interest, was filled with an immense curiosity to have his own hand read, and feeling somewhat shy about putting himself forward, crossed over the room to where Lady Windermere was sitting, and asked her if she thought Mr. Podgers would mind.

"Of course he won't mind," said Lady Windermere, "that is what he is here for. All my lions, Lord Arthur, are performing lions, and jump through hoops whenever I ask them. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. She is coming to lunch with me tomorrow, to talk about bonnets, and if Mr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to gout, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it."

Lord Arthur smiled, and shook his head. "I am not afraid," he answered. "Sybil knows me as well as I know her."

"Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I have merely got experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Mr. Podgers, Lord Arthur Savile is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in London, because that appeared in the *Morning Post* a month ago."

"Dear, Lady Windermere," cried the Marchioness of Jedburgh, "do let Mr. Podgers stay here a little longer. He has just told me I should go on the stage, and I am so interested."

"If he has told you that, Lady Jedburgh, I shall certainly take him away. Come over at once, Mr. Podgers, and read Lord Arthur's hand."

"Well," said Lady Jedburgh, making a little *moue* as she rose from the sofa, "if I am not to be allowed to go on the stage, I must be allowed to be part of the audience at any rate."

"Of course; we are all going to be part of the audience," said Lady Windermere; "and now, Mr. Podgers, be sure and tell us something nice. Lord Arthur is one of my special favorites."

But when Mr. Podgers saw Lord Arthur's hand he grew curiously pale, and said nothing. A shudder seemed to pass through him, and his great bushy eyebrows twitched convulsively, in an odd, irritating way they had when he was puzzled. Then some huge beads of perspiration broke out on his yellow forehead, like a poisonous dew, and his fat fingers grew cold and clammy.

Lord Arthur did not fail to notice these strange signs of agitation, and, for the first time in his life, he himself felt fear. His impulse was to rush from the room; but he restrained himself. It was better to know the worst, whatever it was, than to be left in this hideous uncertainty.

"I am waiting, Mr. Podgers," he said.

"We are all waiting," cried Lady Windermere, in her quick, impatient manner, but the cheiromantist made no reply.

"I believe Arthur is going on the stage," said Lady Jedburgh, "and that, after your scolding, Mr. Podgers is afraid to tell him so."

Suddenly Mr. Podgers dropped Lord Arthur's right hand and seized hold of his left, bending down so low to examine it that the gold rims of his spectacles seemed almost to touch the palm. For a moment his face became a white mask of horror, but he soon recovered his *sang-froid*, and looking up at Lady Windermere, said with a forced smile, "It is the hand of a charming young man."

"Of course it is!" answered Lady Windermere; "but will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know."

"All charming young men are," said Mr. Podgers.

"I don't think a husband should be too fascinating," murmured Lady Jedburgh pensively; "it is so dangerous."

"My dear child, they never are too fascinating," cried Lady Windermere. "But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?"

"Well, within the next few months Lord Arthur will go on a voyage—"

"Oh, yes, his honeymoon, of course!"

"And lose a relative."

"Not his sister, I hope?" said Lady Jedburgh, in a piteous tone of voice.

"Certainly not his sister," answered Mr. Podgers, with a deprecating wave of the hand; "a distant relative merely."

"Well, I am dreadfully disappointed," said Lady Windermere. "I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil tomorrow. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. However, I suppose she had better have a black silk by her; it always does for church, you know. And now let us go to supper. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup. François used to make excellent soup once, but he is so agitated about politics at present that I never feel quite certain about him. I do wish General Boulanger would keep quiet. Duchess, I am sure you are tired?"

"Not at all, dear Gladys," answered the Duchess, waddling toward the door. "I have enjoyed myself immensely, and the cheiropodist, I mean the cheiromantist, is most interest-

ing. Flora, where can my tortoiseshell fan be? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, so much. And my lace shawl, Flora? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, very kind, I'm sure." And the worthy creature finally managed to get downstairs without dropping her scent bottle more than twice.

All this time Lord Arthur Savile had remained standing by the fireplace, with the same feeling of dread over him, the same sickening sense of coming evil. He smiled sadly at his sister, as she swept past him on Lord Plymdale's arm, looking lovely in her pink brocade and pearls, and he hardly heard Lady Windermere when she called to him to follow her. He thought of Sybil Merton, and the idea that anything could come between them made his eyes dim with tears.

Looking at him, one would have said that Nemesis had stolen the shield of Pallas, and shown him the Gorgon's head. He seemed turned to stone, and his face was like marble in its melancholy. He had lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance; and now for the first time he had become conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of

the awful meaning of Doom.

How mad and monstrous it all seemed! Could it be that written on his hand, in characters that he could not read himself, but that another could decipher, was some fearful secret of sin, some blood-red sign of crime? Was there no escape possible? Were we no better than chessmen, moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honor or for shame? His reason revolted against it, and yet he felt that some tragedy was hanging over him, and that he had been suddenly called upon to bear an intolerable burden. Actors are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.

Suddenly Mr. Podgers entered the room. When he saw Lord Arthur he started, and his coarse, fat face became a sort of greenish-yellow color. The two men's eyes met, and for a moment there was silence.

"The Duchess has left one of

her gloves here, Lord Arthur, and has asked me to bring it to her," said Mr. Podgers finally. "Ah, I see it on the sofa! Good evening."

"Mr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you."

"Another time, Lord Arthur—the Duchess is anxious. I am afraid I must go."

"You shall not go. The Duchess is in no hurry."

"Ladies should not be kept waiting, Lord Arthur," said Mr. Podgers, with his sickly smile. "The fair sex is apt to be impatient."

Lord Arthur's finely chiseled lips curled in petulant disdain. The poor Duchess seemed to him of very little importance at that moment. He walked across the room to where Mr. Podgers was standing, and held his hand out.

"Tell me what you saw there," he said. "Tell me the truth. I must know it. I am not a child."

Mr. Podgers' eyes blinked behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, while his fingers played nervously with his watch chain.

"What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand, Lord Arthur, more than I told you?"

"I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I will pay you. I will give you a check for a hundred pounds."

The green eyes flashed for a moment, and then became dull again.

"Guineas?" said Mr. Podgers at last, in a low voice.

"Certainly. I will send you a check tomorrow. What is your club?"

"I have no club. That is to say, not just at present. My address is—but allow me to give you my card." And producing a bit of gilt-edge pasteboard from his waistcoat pocket, Mr. Podgers handed it, with a low bow, to Lord Arthur, who read:

*Mr. SEPTIMUS R. PODGERS  
Professional Cheiromantist  
103a West Moon Street*

"My hours are from ten to four," murmured Mr. Podgers mechanically, "and I make a reduction for families."

"Be quick," cried Lord Arthur, looking very pale, and holding his hand out.

Mr. Podgers glanced nervously round, and drew the heavy portiere across the door.

"It will take a little time, Lord Arthur. You had better sit down."

"Be quick, sir," cried Lord Arthur again, stamping his foot angrily on the polished floor.

Mr. Podgers smiled, drew from his breast pocket a small magnifying glass, and wiped it with his handkerchief.

"I am quite ready," he said.

Ten minutes later, with face blanched by terror, his eyes wild with grief, Lord Arthur Savile rushed from Bentinck House, crushing his way through the crowd of fur-coated footmen that stood round the large striped awning, and seeming not to see or hear anything. The night was bitter cold, and the gas lamps round the square flared and flickered in the keen wind; but his hands were hot with fever, and his forehead burned like fire.

On and on he went, almost with the gait of a drunken man. A policeman looked curiously at him as he passed, and a beggar, who slouched from an archway to ask for alms, grew frightened, seeing misery greater than his own. Once he stopped under a lamp and looked at his hands. He thought he could detect the stain of blood already upon them, and a faint cry broke from his trembling lips.

Murder!—that is what the cheiromantist had seen there. Murder! The very night seemed to know it, and the desolate wind to howl it in his ear. The dark corners of the streets were full of it. It grinned at him from

the roofs of the houses.

First he came to the Park, whose somber woodland seemed to fascinate him. He leaned wearily up against the railings, cooling his brow against the wet metal, and listening to the tremulous silence of the trees. "Murder, murder!" he kept repeating, as though iteration could dim the horror of the word. The sound of his own voice made him shudder, yet he almost hoped that Echo might hear him, and wake the slumbering city from its dreams. He felt a mad desire to stop the casual passer-by, and tell him everything.

Then he wandered across Oxford Street into narrow, shameful alleys. Two women with painted faces mocked at him as he went by. From a dark courtyard came a sound of oaths and blows, followed by shrill screams, and, huddled on a damp doorstep, he saw the crooked-backed forms of poverty andeld. A strange pity came over him. Were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end, as he to his? Were they, like him, merely the puppets of a monstrous show?

And yet it was not the mystery, but the comedy of suffering that struck him; its absolute uselessness, its grotesque want of meaning. How incoherent everything seemed!

How lacking in all harmony! He was amazed at the discord between the shallow optimism of the day and the real facts of existence. He was still very young.

After a time he found himself in front of Marylebone Church. The silent roadway looked like a long riband of polished silver, flecked here and there by the dark arabesques of waving shadows. Far into the distance curved the line of flickering gas lamps, and outside a little walled-in house stood a solitary hansom, the driver asleep inside.

He walked hastily in the direction of Portland Place, now and then looking round, as though he feared that he was being followed. At the corner of Rich Street stood two men, reading a small bill on a hoarding. An odd feeling of curiosity stirred him, and he crossed over. As he came near, the word "Murder," printed in black letters, met his eye. He started, and a deep flush came into his cheek. It was an advertisement offering a reward for any information leading to the arrest of a man of medium height, between 30 and 40 years of age, wearing a billycock hat, a black coat, and check trousers, and with a scar on his right cheek.

He read it over and over,

again, and wondered if the wretched man would be caught, and how he had been scarred. Perhaps, some day, his own name might be placarded on the walls of London. Some day, perhaps, a price would be set on his head also.

The thought made him sick with horror. He turned on his heel and hurried on into the night.

Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses, and it was bright dawn when he found himself at last in Piccadilly Circus. As he strolled home toward Belgrave Square, he met the great wagons on their way to Covent Garden. The white-smocked carters, with their pleasant sunburnt faces and coarse curly hair, strode sturdily on, cracking their whips, and calling out now and then to each other; on the back of a huge gray horse, the leader of a jangling team, sat a chubby boy, with a bunch of primroses in his battered hat, keeping tight hold of the mane with his little hands, and laughing; and the great piles of vegetables looked like masses of jade against the morning sky, like masses of green jade against the pink petals of some marvelous rose.

Lord Arthur felt curiously

affected, he could not tell why. There was something in the dawn's delicate loveliness that seemed to him inexpressibly pathetic, and he thought of all the days that break in beauty, and that set in storm. These rustics, too, with their rough, good-humored voices, and their nonchalant ways—what a strange London they saw! A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid, ghost-like city, a desolate town of tombs! He wondered what they thought of it, and whether they knew anything of its splendor and its shame, of its fierce, fiery-colored joys, and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. Probably it was to them merely a mart where they brought their fruit to sell, and where they tarried for a few hours at most, leaving the streets still silent, the houses still asleep. It gave him pleasure to watch them as they went by. Rude as they were, with their heavy, hobnailed shoes, and their awkward gait, they brought a little of Arcady with them. He felt that they had lived with Nature, and that she had taught them peace. He envied them all that they did not know.

By the time he had reached Belgrave Square the sky was a faint blue, and the birds were

beginning to twitter in the gardens.

When Lord Arthur woke it was twelve o'clock, and the midday sun was streaming through the ivory-silk curtains of his room. He got up and looked out of the window. A dim haze of heat was hanging over the great city, and the roofs of the houses were like dull silver. In the flickering green of the square below some children were flitting about like white butterflies, and the pavement was crowded with people on their way to the Park. Never had life seemed lovelier to him, never had the things of evil seemed more remote.

Then his valet brought him a cup of chocolate on a tray. After he had drunk it, he drew aside a heavy *portiere* of peach-colored plush, and passed into the bathroom. The light stole softly from above, through thin slabs of transparent onyx, and the water in the marble tank glimmered like a moonstone. He plunged hastily in, till the cool ripples touched throat and hair, and then dipped his head right under, as though he would have wiped away the stain of some shameful memory. When he stepped out he felt almost at peace. The exquisite physical

conditions of the moment had dominated him, as indeed often happens in the case of very finely wrought natures, for the senses, like fire, can purify as well as destroy.

After breakfast he flung himself down on a divan and lit a cigarette. On the mantelshelf, framed in dainty old brocade, stood a large photograph of Sybil Merton, as he had seen her first at Lady Noel's ball. The small, exquisitely shaped head drooped slightly to one side, as though the thin, reed-like throat could hardly bear the burden of so much beauty; the lips were slightly parted, and seemed made for sweet music; and all the tender purity of girlhood looked out in wonder from the dreaming eyes. With her soft, clinging dress of *crepe-de-chine*, and her large leaf-shaped fan, she looked like one of those delicate little figures men find in the olive woods near Tanagra; and there was a touch of Greek grace in her pose and attitude. Yet she was not *petite*. She was simply perfectly proportioned—a rare thing in an age when so many women are either over life-size or insignificant.

Now as Lord Arthur looked at her he was filled with the terrible pity that is born of love. He felt that to marry her,

with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas, a sin worse than any the Borgia had ever dreamed of. What happiness could there be for them when at any moment he might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in his hand? What manner of life would be theirs while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales?

The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. Of this he was quite resolved. Ardently though he loved the girl—and the mere touch of her fingers, when they sat together, made each nerve of his body thrill with exquisite joy—he recognized none the less clearly where his duty lay, and was fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder. This done, he could stand before the altar with Sybil Merton, and give his life into her hands without terror of wrongdoing. This done, he could take her to his arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for him, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

Many men in his position would have preferred the primrose path of dalliance to the steep heights of duty; but

Lord Arthur was too conscientious to set pleasure above principle. There was more than mere passion in his love; and Sybil was to him a symbol of all that is good and noble. For a moment he had a natural repugnance against what he was asked to do, but it soon passed away. His heart told him that it was not a sin, but a sacrifice; his reason reminded him that there was no other course open. He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to triumph over love.

Sooner or later we are all called upon to decide on the same issue—of us all the same question is asked. To Lord Arthur it came early in life—before his nature had been spoiled by the calculating cynicism of middle-age, or his heart corroded by the shallow, fashionable egotism of our day, and he felt no hesitation about doing his duty. Fortunately also, for him, he was no mere dreamer, or idle dilettante. Had he been so, he would have hesitated, like Hamlet, and let irresolution mar his purpose. But he was essentially practical. Life to him meant action. He had that rarest of all things, common sense.

The wild, turbid feelings of the previous night had by this time completely passed away, and it was almost with a sense of shame that he looked back on his mad wanderings from street to street, his fierce emotional agony. The very sincerity of his sufferings made them seem unreal to him now. He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to rant and rave about the inevitable. The only question that seemed to trouble him was, whom to make away with; for he was not blind to the fact that murder, like the religions of the Pagan world, requires a victim as well as a priest. Not being a genius, he had no enemies, and indeed he felt that this was not the time for the gratification of any personal pique or dislike, the mission in which he was engaged being one of great and grave solemnity.

He accordingly made out a list of friends and relatives on a sheet of notepaper, and after careful consideration decided in favor of Lady Clementina Beauchamp, a dear old lady who lived in Curzon Street, and was his own second cousin by his mother's side. He had always been very fond of Lady Clem, as everyone called her, and as he was very wealthy himself, having inherited all Lord Rugby's property when he

came of age, there was no possibility of his deriving any vulgar monetary advantage by her death. In fact, the more he thought over the matter, the more she seemed to him to be just the right person, and, feeling that any delay would be unfair to Sybil, he determined to make his arrangements at once.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to settle with the cheiromantist; so he sat down at a small Sheraton writing table that stood near the window, drew a check for £105, payable to the order of Mr. Septimus Podgers, and, enclosing it in an envelope, told his valet to take it to West Moon Street. He then telephoned to the stables for his hansom, and dressed to go out. As he was leaving the room he looked back at Sybil Merton's photograph, and swore that, come what may, he would never let her know what he was doing for her sake, but would keep the secret of his self-sacrifice hidden always in his heart.

On his way to the Buckingham he stopped at a florist's and sent Sybil a beautiful basket of narcissus, with lovely white petals and staring pheasants' eyes, and on arriving at the club went straight to the library, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to bring him

a lemon-and-soda, and a book on Toxicology. He had fully decided that poison was the best means to adopt in this troublesome business. Anything like personal violence was extremely distasteful to him, and besides, he was very anxious not to murder Lady Clementina in any way that might attract public attention, as he hated the idea of being lionized at Lady Windermere's, or seeing his name figuring in the paragraphs of vulgar society newspapers.

He had also to think of Sybil's father and mother, who were rather old-fashioned people, and might possibly object to the marriage if there was anything like a scandal, though he felt certain that if he told them the whole facts of the case they would be the very first to appreciate the motives that had actuated him. He had every reason, then, to decide in favor of poison. It was safe, sure, and quiet, and did away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most Englishmen, he had a rooted objection.

Of the science of poisons, however, he knew absolutely nothing, and as the waiter seemed quite unable to find anything in the library but *Ruff's Guide* and *Bailey's Magazine* he examined the

bookshelves himself, and finally came across a handsomely bound edition of the *Pharmacopoeia*, and a copy of Erskine's *Toxicology*, edited by Sir Mathew Reid, the president of the Royal College of Physicians, and one of the oldest members of the Buckingham, having been elected in mistake for somebody else; a *contretemps* that so enraged the Committee, that when the real man came up they blackballed him unanimously.

Lord Arthur was a good deal puzzled at the technical terms used in both books, and had begun to regret that he had not paid more attention to his classics at Oxford, when in the second volume of Erskine he found a very interesting and complete account of the properties of aconitine, written in fairly clear English. It seemed to him to be exactly the poison he wanted. It was swift—indeed, almost immediate, in its effect—perfectly painless, and when taken in the form of a gelatine capsule, the mode recommended by Sir Mathew, not by any means unpalatable. He accordingly made a note, on his shirt cuff, of the amount necessary for a fatal dose, put the books back in their places, and strolled up St. James's Street, to Pestle and Humbey's, the great chemists.

Mr. Pestle, who always attended personally on the aristocracy, was a good deal surprised at the order, and in a very deferential manner murmured something about a medical certificate being necessary. However, as soon as Lord Arthur explained to him that it was for a large Norwegian mastiff that he was obliged to get rid of, as it showed signs of incipient rabies, and had already bitten the coachman twice in the calf of the leg, he expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied, complimented Lord Arthur on his wonderful knowledge of Toxicology, and had the prescription made up immediately.

Lord Arthur put the capsule into a pretty little silver *bonbonniere* that he saw in a shop window in Bond Street, threw away Pestle and Humbley's ugly pill box, and drove off at once to Lady Clemencia's.

"Well, monsieur le mauvais sujet," cried the old lady, as he entered the room, "why haven't you been to see me all this time?"

"My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself," said Lord Arthur, smiling.

"I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil Merton, buying *chiffons* and talking nonsense? I

cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public, or in private for that matter."

"I assure you I have not seen Sybil for twenty-four hours, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her milliners."

"Of course; that is the only reason you come to see an ugly old woman like myself. I wonder you men don't take warning. *On a fait des folies pour moi*, and here I am, a poor rheumatic creature, with a false front and a bad temper. Why, if it were not for dear Lady Jansen, who sends me all the worst French novels she can find, I don't think I could get through the day. Doctors are no use at all, except to get fees out of me. They can't even cure my heartburn."

"I have brought you a cure for that, Lady Clem," said Lord Arthur gravely. "It is a wonderful thing, invented by an American."

"I don't think I like American inventions, Arthur. I am quite sure I don't. I read some American novels lately, and they were quite nonsensical."

"Oh, but there is no nonsense at all about this, Lady Clem! I assure you it is a

perfect cure. You must promise to try it"—and Lord Arthur brought the little box out of his pocket and handed it to her.

"Well, the box is charming, Arthur. Is it really a present? That is very sweet of you. And is this the wonderful medicine? It looks like a *bonbon*. I'll take it at once."

"Good heavens, Lady Clem," cried Lord Arthur, catching hold of her hand, "you mustn't do anything of the kind. It is a homeopathic medicine, and if you take it without having heartburn it might do you no end of harm. Wait till you have an attack, and take it then. You will be astonished at the result."

"I should like to take it now," said Lady Clementina, holding up to the light the little transparent capsule, with its floating bubble of liquid aconitine. "I am sure it is delicious. The fact is that, though I hate doctors, I love medicines. However, I'll keep it till my next attack."

"And when will that be?" asked Lord Arthur eagerly. "Will it be soon?"

"I hope not for a week. I had a very bad time yesterday morning with it. But one never knows."

"You are sure to have one before the end of the month then, Lady Clem?"

"I am afraid so. But how sympathetic you are today, Arthur! Really, Sybil has done you a great deal of good. And now you must run away, for I am dining with some very dull people, who won't talk scandal, and I know that if I don't get my sleep now I shall never be able to keep awake during dinner. Goodbye, Arthur, give my love to Sybil, and thank you so much for the American medicine."

"You won't forget to take it, Lady Clem, will you?" said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat.

"Of course I won't, you silly boy. I think it is most kind of you to think of me, and I shall write and tell you if I want any more."

Lord Arthur left the house in high spirits, and with a feeling of immense relief.

That night he had an interview with Sybil Merton. He told her how he had been suddenly placed in a position of terrible difficulty, from which neither honor nor duty would allow him to recede. He told her that the marriage must be put off for the present, as until he had got rid of his fearful entanglements, he was not a free man. He implored her to trust him, and not to have any doubts about the future. Everything would come right,

but a patience was necessary.

The scene took place in the conservatory of Mr. Merton's house, in Park Lane, where Lord Arthur had dined as usual. Sybil had never seemed more happy, and for a moment Lord Arthur had been tempted to play the coward's part, to write to Lady Clementina for the pill, and to let the marriage go on as if there was no such person as Mr. Podgers in the world. His better nature, however, soon asserted itself, and even when Sybil flung herself weeping into his arms he did not falter. The beauty that stirred his senses had touched his conscience also. He felt that to wreck so fair a life for the sake of a few months' pleasure would be a wrong thing to do.

He stayed with Sybil till nearly midnight, comforting her and being comforted in turn, and early the next morning he left for Venice, after writing a manly, firm letter to Mr. Merton about the necessary postponement of the marriage.

In Venice he met his brother, Lord Surbiton, who happened to have come over from Corfu in his yacht. The two young men spent a delightful fortnight together. In the morning they rode on the Lido, or glided up and down the green canal in their long

black gondola; in the afternoon they usually entertained visitors on the yacht; and in the evening they dined at Florian's, and smoked innumerable cigarettes on the Piazza. Yet somehow Lord Arthur was not happy. Every day he studied the obituary column in the *Times*, expecting to see a notice of Lady Clementina's death, but every day he was disappointed.

He began to be afraid that some accident had happened to her, and often regretted that he had prevented her taking the aconitine when she had been so anxious to try its effect. Sybil's letters, too, though full of love and trust and tenderness, were often very sad in their tone, and sometimes he used to think that he was parted from her forever.

After a fortnight Lord Surbiton got bored with Venice, and determined to run down the coast to Ravenna, as he heard that there was some capital cock-shooting in the Pinetum. Lord Arthur at first refused absolutely to come, but Surbiton, of whom he was extremely fond, finally persuaded him that if he stayed at Danielli's by himself he would be moped to death, and on the morning of the 15th they started, with a strong nor'east wind blowing, and a rather choppy sea. The sport was excellent, and the free, open-air

life brought the color back to Lord Arthur's cheek; but about the 22nd he became anxious about Lady Clementina, and, in spite of Surbiton's remonstrances, came back to Venice by train.

As he stepped out of his gondola onto the hotel steps, the proprietor came forward to meet him with a sheaf of telegrams. Lord Arthur snatched them out of his hand and tore them open. Everything had been successful. Lady Clementina had died quite suddenly on the night of the 17th!

His first thought was for Sybil, and he sent her off a telegram announcing his immediate return to London. He then ordered his valet to pack his things for the night mail, sent his gondoliers about five times their proper fare, and ran up to his sitting room with a light step and buoyant heart. There he found three letters waiting for him.

One was from Sybil herself, full of sympathy and condolence. The others were from his mother, and from Lady Clementina's solicitor. It seemed that the old lady had dined with the Duchess that very night, had delighted everyone by her wit and *esprit*, but had gone home somewhat early, complaining of heartburn. In the morning she was found

dead in her bed, having apparently suffered no pain. Sir Mathew Reid had been sent for at once, but, of course, there was nothing to be done, and she was to be buried on the 22nd at Beauchamp Chalcote. A few days before she died she had made her will, and left Lord Arthur her little house in Curzon Street, and all her furniture, personal effects, and pictures, with the exception of her collection of miniatures, which was to go to her sister, Lady Margaret Rufford, and her amethyst necklace, which Sybil Merton was to have. The property was not of much value; but Mr. Mansfield, the solicitor, was extremely anxious for Lord Arthur to return at once, if possible, as there were a great many bills to be paid, and Lady Clementina had never kept any regular accounts.

Lord Arthur was very much touched by Lady Clementina's kind remembrance of him, and felt that Mr. Podgers had a great deal to answer for. His love of Sybil, however, dominated every other emotion, and the consciousness that he had done his duty gave him peace and comfort. When he arrived at Charing Cross he felt perfectly happy.

The Mertons received him very kindly. Sybil made him promise that he would never

again allow anything to come between them, and the marriage was fixed for the 7th of June. Life seemed to him once more bright and beautiful, and all his old gladness came back to him again.

One day, however, as he was going over the house in Curzon Street, in company with Lady Clementina's solicitor and Sybil herself, burning packages of faded letters, and turning out drawers of odd rubbish, the young girl suddenly gave a cry of delight.

"What have you found, Sybil?" said Lord Arthur, looking up from his work, and smiling.

"This lovely little silver *bonbonniere*, Arthur. Isn't it quaint and Dutch? Do give it to me! I know amethysts won't become me till I am over eighty."

It was the box that had held the aconitine.

Lord Arthur started, and a faint blush came into his cheek. He had almost entirely forgotten what he had done, and it seemed to him a curious coincidence that Sybil, for whose sake he had gone through all that terrible anxiety, should have been the first to remind him of it.

"Of course you can have it, Sybil. I gave it to poor Lady Clem myself."

"Oh, thank you, Arthur, and may I have the *bonbon*, too? I had no notion that Lady Clementina liked sweets. I thought she was far too intellectual."

Lord Arthur grew deadly pale, and a horrible idea crossed his mind.

"*Bonbon*, Sybil? What do you mean?" he said in a slow, hoarse voice.

"There is one in it, that is all. It looks quite old and dusty, and I have not the slightest intention of eating it. What is the matter, Arthur? How white you look!"

Lord Arthur rushed across the room and seized the box. Inside it was the amber-colored capsule, with its poison bubble. Lady Clementina had died a natural death after all!

The shock of the discovery was almost too much for him. He flung the capsule into the fire and sank on the sofa with a cry of despair.

Mr. Merton was a good deal distressed at the second postponement of the marriage, and Lady Julia, who had already ordered her dress for the wedding, did all in her power to make Sybil break off the match. Dearly, however, as Sybil loved her mother, she had given her whole life into Lord Arthur's hands, and nothing

that Lady Julia could say could make her waver in her faith.

As for Lord Arthur himself, it took him days to get over his terrible disappointment, and for a time his nerves were completely unstrung. His excellent common sense, however, soon asserted itself, and his sound, practical mind did not leave him long in doubt about what to do. Poison having proved a complete failure, dynamite, or some other form of explosive, was obviously the proper thing to try.

He accordingly looked again over the list of his friends and relatives, and, after careful consideration, determined to blow up his uncle, the Dean of Chichester. The Dean, who was a man of great culture and learning, was extremely fond of clocks, and had a wonderful collection of timepieces, ranging from the Fifteenth Century to the present day, and it seemed to Lord Arthur that this hobby of the good Dean's offered him an excellent opportunity for carrying out his scheme.

Where to procure an explosive machine was, of course, quite another matter. The London Directory gave him no information on the point, and he felt that there was very little use in going to Scotland Yard about it, as they never seemed

to know anything about the movements of the dynamite faction till after an explosion had taken place.

Suddenly he thought of his friend Rouvaloff, a young Russian of very revolutionary tendencies, whom he had met at Lady Windermere's in the winter. Count Rouvaloff was supposed to be writing a life of Peter the Great, and to have come over to England for the purpose of studying the documents relating to that Tsar's residence in this country as a ship's carpenter; but it was generally suspected that he was a Nihilist agent, and there was no doubt that the Russian Embassy did not look with any favor on his presence in London. Lord Arthur felt that he was just the man for his purpose, and drove down one morning to his lodgings in Bloomsbury, to ask his advice and assistance.

"So you are taking up politics seriously?" said Count Rouvaloff, when Lord Arthur had told him the object of his mission; but Lord Arthur, who hated swagger of any kind, felt bound to admit to him that he had not the slightest interest in social questions, and simply wanted the explosive machine for a purely family matter, in which no one was concerned but himself.

Count Rouvaloff looked at him for some moments in amazement, and then, seeing that he was quite serious, wrote an address on a piece of paper, initialed it, and handed it to him across the table.

"Scotland Yard would give a good deal to know this address, my dear fellow."

"They shan't have it," cried Lord Arthur, laughing; and after shaking the young Russian warmly by the hand he ran downstairs, examined the paper, and told the coachman to drive to Soho Square.

There he dismissed him, and strolled down Greek Street, till he came to a place called Bayle's Court. He passed under the archway, and found himself in a curious *cul-de-sac* that was apparently occupied by a French laundry, as a perfect network of clotheslines was stretched across from house to house, and there was a flutter of white linen in the morning air. He walked right to the end, and knocked at a little green house.

After some delay, during which every window became a blurred mass of peering faces, the door was opened by a rather rough-looking foreigner, who asked him in very bad English what his business was. Lord Arthur handed him the paper Count Rouvaloff had

given him. When the man saw it he bowed and invited Lord Arthur into a very shabby front parlor on the ground floor, and in a few moments Herr Winckelkopf, as he was called in England, bustled into the room, with a very wine-stained napkin around his neck, and a fork in his left hand.

"Count Rouvaloff has given me an introduction to you," said Lord Arthur, bowing, "and I am anxious to have a short interview with you on a matter of business. My name is Smith, Mr. Robert Smith, and I want you to supply me with an explosive clock."

"Charmed to meet you, Lord Arthur," said the genial little German, laughing. "Don't look so alarmed, it is my duty to know everybody, and I remember seeing you one evening at Lady Windermere's. I hope her ladyship is quite well. Do you mind sitting with me while I finish my breakfast? There is an excellent *pate*, and my friends are kind enough to say that my Rhine wine is better than any they get at the Germany Embassy." And before Lord Arthur had got over his surprise at being recognized, he found himself seated in the back room, sipping the most delicious Marcobrünner out of a pale-yellow hock-glass marked with the Imperial monogram,

and chatting in the friendliest manner possible to the famous conspirator.

"Explosive clocks," said Herr Winckelkopf, "are not very good things for foreign exportation, as, even if they succeed in passing the Custom House, the train service is so irregular that they usually go off before they have reached their proper destination. If, however, you want one for home use I can supply you with an excellent article, and guarantee that you will be satisfied with the result. May I ask for whom it is intended? If it is for the police, or for anyone connected with Scotland Yard, I am afraid I cannot do anything for you. The English detectives are really our best friends, and I have always found that by relying on their stupidity we can do exactly what we like. I could not spare one of them."

"I assure you," said Lord Arthur, "that it has nothing to do with the police at all. In fact, the clock is intended for the Dean of Chichester."

"Dear me! I had no idea that you felt so strongly about religion, Lord Arthur. Few young men do nowadays."

"I am afraid you overrate me, Herr Winckelkopf," said Lord Arthur, blushing. "I know nothing about theology."

"It is a purely private matter then?"

"Purely private."

Herr Winckelkopf shrugged and left the room, returning in a few minutes with a round cake of dynamite about the size of a penny, and a pretty little French clock, surmounted by an ormolu figure of Liberty trampling on the hydra of Despotism.

Lord Arthur's face brightened up when he saw it. "That is just what I want," he cried, "and now tell me how it goes off."

"Ah, there is my secret," answered Herr Winckelkopf, contemplating his invention with a justifiable look of pride; "let me know when you wish it to explode, and I will set the machine to the moment."

"Well, today is Tuesday, and if you could send it off at once—"

"That is impossible. I have a great deal of important work on hand for some friends of mine in Moscow: Still, I might send it off tomorrow."

"Oh, it will be quite time enough," said Lord Arthur politely, "if it is delivered tomorrow night or Thursday morning. For the moment of the explosion, say Friday at noon exactly. The Dean is always at home at that hour."

"Friday, at noon," repeated

Herr Winckelkopf, and he made a note to that effect in a large ledger that was lying on a bureau near the fireplace.

"And now," said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat, "pray let me know how much I am in your debt."

"It is such a small matter, Lord Arthur, that I do not care to make any charge. The dynamite comes to seven and sixpence, the clock will be three pounds ten, and the carriage about five shillings. I am only too pleased to oblige any friend of Count Rouvaloff's."

"But your trouble, Herr Winckelkopf?"

"Oh, that is nothing! It is a pleasure to me. I do not work for money: I live entirely for my art."

Lord Arthur laid down £4 2s. 6d. on the table, thanked the little German for his kindness, and, having succeeded in declining an invitation to meet some Anarchists at a meat-tea on the following Saturday, left the house and went off to the Park.

For the next two days he was in a state of the greatest excitement, and on Friday at twelve o'clock he drove down to the Buckingham to wait for news. All afternoon the stolid hall-porter kept posting up telegrams from various parts of the country giving the results of

horse races, the verdicts in divorce suits, the state of the weather, and the like, while the tape ticked out wearisome details about an all-night sitting in the House of Commons and a small panic on the Stock Exchange. At four o'clock the evening papers came in, and Lord Arthur disappeared into the library with the *Pall Mall*, the *St. James's*, the *Globe*, and the *Echo*, to the immense indignation of Colonel Goodchild, who wanted to read the reports of a speech he had delivered that morning at the Mansion House, on the subject of South African Missions, and the advisability of having black Bishops in every province, and for some reason or other had a strong prejudice against the *Evening News*.

None of the papers, however, contained even the slightest allusion to Chichester, and Lord Arthur felt that the attempt must have failed. It was a terrible blow to him, and for a time he was quite unnerved. Herr Winckelkopf, whom he went to see the next day, was full of elaborate apologies, and offered to supply him with another clock free of charge, or with a case of nitroglycerine bombs at cost price. But he had lost all faith in explosives, and Herr Winckelkopf himself acknowledged that everything is

so adulterated nowadays that even dynamite can hardly be got in a pure condition. The little German, however, while admitting that something must have gone wrong with the machinery, was not without hope that the clock might still go off, and instanced the case of a barometer that he had once sent to the military Governor at Odessa; which, though timed to explode in ten days, had not done so for something like three months. It was quite true that when it did go off, it merely succeeded in blowing a housemaid to atoms, the Governor having gone out of town six weeks before; but at least it showed that dynamite, as a destructive force, was, when under the control of machinery, a powerful, though somewhat unpunctual agent.

Lord Arthur was a little consoled by this reflection, but even here he was destined to disappointment, for two days afterward, as he was going upstairs, the Duchess called him into her boudoir and showed him a letter she had just received from the Deanery.

"Jane writes charming letters," said the Duchess. "You must really read her last. It is quite as good as the novels Mudie sends us."

Lord Arthur seized the letter from her. It ran as follows:

The Deanery, Chichester,  
27th May.

My Dearest Aunt,

Thank you so much for the flannel for the Dorcas Society; and also for the gingham. I quite agree with you that it is nonsense their wanting to wear pretty things, but everybody is so Radical and irreligious nowadays, that it is difficult to make them see that they should not try and dress like the upper classes. I am sure I don't know what we are coming to.-As Papa has often said in his sermons, we live in an age of unbelief.

We have had great fun over a clock that an unknown admirer sent Papa last Thursday. It arrived in a wooden box from London, carriage paid; and Papa feels it must have been sent by someone who had read his remarkable sermon, "Is Licence Liberty?" for on the top of the clock was a figure of a woman, with what Papa said was the cap of Liberty on her head. I don't think it very becoming myself, but Papa said it was historical, so I suppose it is all right.

Parker unpacked it, and Papa put it on the mantelpiece in the library, and we were all sitting there on Friday morning when just as the clock struck twelve, we heard a whirring noise, a little puff of smoke came from the pedestal of the figure, and the goddess of Liberty fell off,

and broke her nose on the fender! Maria was quite alarmed, but it looked so ridiculous that James and I went off into fits of laughter, and even Papa was amused.

When we examined it, we found it was a sort of alarm clock, and that, if you set it to a particular hour, and put some gunpowder and a cap under a little hammer, it went off whenever you wanted. Papa said it must not remain in the library, as it made a noise, so Reggie carried it away to the schoolroom, and does nothing but have small explosions all day long. Do you think Arthur would like one for a wedding present? I suppose they are quite fashionable in London. Papa says they should do a great deal of good, as they show that Liberty can't last, but must fall down. Papa says Liberty was invented at the time of the French Revolution. How awful it seems!

I have now to go to the Dorcas, where I will read your most instructive letter. How true, dear aunt, your idea is, that in their rank of life they should wear what is unbecoming. I must say it is absurd, their anxiety about dress, when there are so many more important things in this world, and in the next. I am so glad your flowered poplin turned out so

well, and that your lace was not torn. I am wearing my yellow satin, that you so kindly gave me, at the Bishop's on Wednesday, and think it will look all right. Would you have bows or not? Jennings says that everyone wears bows now, and that the underskirt should be frilled. Reggie has just had another explosion, and Papa has ordered the clock to be sent to the stables. I don't think Papa likes it so much as he did at first, though he is very flattered at being sent such a pretty and ingenious toy. It shows that people read his sermons, and profit by them.

Papa sends his love, in which James, and Reggie, and Maria all unite, and, hoping that Uncle Cecil's gout is better, believe me, dear aunt, ever your affectionate niece.

Jane Percy.

P.S.—Do tell me about the bows. Jennings insists they are the fashion.

Lord Arthur looked so serious and unhappy over the letter that the Duchess went into fits of laughter.

"My dear Arthur," she cried, "I shall never show you a young lady's letter again! But what shall I say about the clock? I think it is a capital invention, and I should like to have one myself."

"I don't think much of them," said Lord Arthur, with a sad smile and, after kissing his mother, he left the room.

When he got upstairs, he flung himself on a sofa, and his eyes filled with tears. He had done his best to commit murder, but on both occasions he had failed, and through no fault of his own. He had tried to do his duty, but it seemed as if Destiny herself had turned traitor. He was oppressed with the sense of the barrenness of good intentions, of the futility of trying to be fine. Perhaps it would be better to break off the marriage altogether. Sybil would suffer, it is true, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for himself, what did it matter? There is always some war in which a man can die, some cause to which a man can give his life, and as life had no pleasure for him, so death had no terror. Let Destiny work out his doom. He would not stir to help her.

At half-past seven he dressed and went down to the club. Surbiton was there with a party of young men, and he was obliged to dine with them. Their trivial conversation and idle jests did not interest him, and as soon as coffee was brought he left them, inventing some engagement in order to

get away. As he was going out of the club, the hall-porter handed him a letter. It was from Herr Winckelkopf, asking him to call the next evening and look at an explosive umbrella that went off as soon as it was opened. It was the very latest invention, and had just arrived from Geneva.

He tore the letter up into fragments. He had made up his mind not to try any more experiments. Then he wandered down to the Thames Embankment and sat for hours by the river. The moon peered through a mane of tawny clouds, as if it were a lion's eye, and innumerable stars spangled the hollow vault, like gold dust powdered on a purple dome. Now and then a barge swung out into the turbid stream and floated away with the tide, and the railway signals changed from green to scarlet as the trains ran shrieking across the bridge. After some time, twelve o'clock boomed from the tall tower at Westminster, and at each stroke of the sonorous bell the night seemed to tremble. Then the railway lights went out, one solitary lamp left gleaming like a large ruby on a giant mast, and the roar of the city became fainter.

At two o'clock he got up, and strolled toward Blackfriars. How unreal everything looked!

How like a strange dream! The houses on the other side of the river seemed built out of darkness. One would have said that silver and shadow had fashioned the world anew. The huge dome of St. Paul's loomed like a bubble through the dusky air.

As he approached Cleopatra's Needle he saw a man leaning over the parapet, and as he came nearer the man looked up, the gaslight falling full upon his face.

It was Mr. Podgers, the cheiromantist! No one could mistake the fat, flabby face, the gold-rimmed spectacles, the sickly feeble smile, the sensual mouth.

Lord Arthur stopped. A brilliant idea flashed across him, and he stole softly up behind. In a moment he had seized Mr. Podgers by the legs and flung him into the Thames. There was a coarse oath, a heavy splash, and all was still. Lord Arthur looked anxiously over, but could see nothing of the cheiromantist but a tall hat, pirouetting in an eddy of moonlit water. After a time it also sank, and no trace of Mr. Podgers was visible. Once he thought that he caught sight of the bulky misshapen figure striking out for the staircase by the bridge, and a horrible feeling of failure came over him; but it turned out to be merely a reflection,

and when the moon shone out from behind a cloud it passed away. At last he seemed to have realized the decree of relief, and Sybil's name came to his lips.

"Have you dropped anything, sir?" said a voice behind him suddenly.

He turned round and saw a policeman with a bull's-eye lantern.

"Nothing of importance, Sergeant," he answered, smiling, and hailing a passing hansom, he jumped in and told the man to drive to Belgrave Square.

For the next few days he alternated between hope and fear. There were moments when he almost expected Mr. Podgers to walk into the room, and yet at other times he felt that Fate could not be so unjust to him. Twice he went to the cheiromantist's address in West Moon Street, but he could not bring himself to ring the bell. He longed for certainty, and was afraid of it.

Finally it came. He was sitting in the smoking room of the club having tea, and listening rather wearily to Surbiton's account of the last comic song at the Gaiety, when the waiter came in with the evening papers. He took up the *St. James's*, and was listlessly turning over its pages when this strange heading caught his eye:

### SUICIDE OF A CHEIROMANTIST

He turned pale with excitement, and began to read. The paragraph ran as follows:

Yesterday morning, at seven o'clock, the body of Mr. Septimus R. Podgers, the eminent cheiromantist, was washed on shore at Greenwich, just in front of the Ship Hotel. The unfortunate gentleman had been missing for some days, and considerable anxiety for his safety had been felt in cheiromantic circles. It is supposed that he committed suicide under the influence of a temporary mental derangement, caused by over-work, and a verdict to that effect was returned this afternoon by the coroner's jury. Mr. Podgers had just completed an elaborate treatise on the subject of the Human Hand, that will shortly be published, when it will no doubt attract much attention. The deceased was 65 years of age, and does not seem to have left any relations...

Lord Arthur rushed out of the club with the paper still in his hand, to the immense amazement of the hall-porter, who tried in vain to stop him, and drove at once to Park Lane. Sybil saw him from the window, and something told her

that he was the bearer of good news. She ran down to meet him, and, when she saw his face, she knew that all was well.

"My dear Sybil," cried Lord Arthur, "let us be married tomorrow!"

"You foolish boy! Why, the cake is not even ordered!" said Sybil, laughing through her tears.

When the wedding took place, some three weeks later St. Peter's was crowded with a perfect mob of smart people. The service was read in the most impressive manner by the Dean of Chichester, and everybody agreed that they had never seen a handsomer couple than the bride and bridegroom. They were more than handsome, however—they were happy. Never for a single moment did Lord Arthur regret all that he had suffered for Sybil's sake, while she, on her side, gave him the best things a woman can give to any man—worship, tenderness, and love. For them romance was not killed by reality. They always felt young.

Some years afterward, when two beautiful children had been born to them, Lady Windermere came down on a visit to Alton Priory, a lovely old place that had been the Duke's wedding present to his son; and one afternoon as she was sitting

with Lady Arthur under a lime tree in the garden, watching the little boy and girl as they played up and down the rose walk, like fitful sunbeams, she suddenly took her hostess' hand in hers, and said, "Are you happy, Sybil?"

"Dear Lady Windermere, of course I am happy. Aren't you?"

"I have no time to be happy, Sybil. I always like the last person who is introduced to me; but, as a rule, as soon as I know people I get tired of them."

"Don't your lions satisfy you, Lady Windermere?"

"Oh, dear, no! Lions are only good for one season. As soon as their manes are cut, they are the dullest creatures going. Besides, they behave very badly, if you are really nice to them. Do you remember that horrid Mr. Podgers? He was a dreadful impostor. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. He has really made me hate cheiromancy. I go in for telepathy now. It is much more amusing."

"You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, Lady Windermere. It is the only subject that Arthur does not like people to chaff about. I assure you he is quite serious over it."

"You don't mean to say that he believes in it, Sybil?"

"Ask him, Lady Windermere, here he is." And Lord Arthur came up the garden with a large bunch of yellow roses in his hand, and his two children dancing round him.

"Lord Arthur?"

"Yes, Lady Windermere."

"You don't mean to say that you believe in cheiromancy?"

"Of course I do," said the young man, smiling.

"But why?"

"Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life," he murmured, throwing himself into a wicker chair.

"My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?"

"Sybil," he answered, handing his wife the roses, and looking into her violet eyes.

"What nonsense!" cried Lady Windermere. "I never heard such nonsense in all my life."

# **Jon L. Breen**

## **The Crowded Hours**

*This was the 305th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—it first appeared in our May 1967 issue...*

*You will find it a bitingly accurate parody-pastiche of Ed McBain's 87th Precinct police procedurals. One might even say that Jon L. McBreen—pardon, Jon L. Breen—gives us a "hard-hitting, realistic, detail-packed investigation," in miniature, by the squad of the 97th Precinct. Ed McBain read the parody-pastiche in manuscript and thought it "a fine and funny job"...*

### **Detectives: HOMICIDE SQUAD of the 97th Precinct**

**T**he city in these pages is real.

*The characters are drawn directly from life. The police procedure is strictly a product of the author's imagination.*

The city.

She.

They'll all tell you the city's a female. To some she's a laughing girl, to some a full, ripe woman; to some a lady, to some a dame, and to more than a few a bitch. But she's a female to all of them—just as she is to you, whether you grew up in a swank penthouse in Tewart

Towers or a slum tenement in downtown Itolja, whether you graduated from the plush country club of Elizabethtown High or survived the hard knocks of North Manual Trades—or even if you met her only as a mature man and felt you'd known her always.

A female, this city, a she, whether she's warm and comforting or cool and exhilarating or hot and making you drip sweat or cold and unfriendly and chilling—she can be any of these, and she'll be all of them at some point to every man, even you who love her. At noon

her tall spires implore heaven like arms of shimmering brilliance, gazing with haughty magnificence at the clear waters of her harbor. She exudes exuberant life. The curves of her shoreline, the patterns of her streets and freeways can be graceful or provocative or cute—their charm can obscure the midriff bulge of her slums. She's home to more Swiss than the city of Geneva, more Canadians than Toronto and Vancouver combined.

When you love her—if you love her, and how could one not love her?—her small flaws don't repel you but make you love her all the more, this sweetheart of your youth, this mistress of your best years, this comforting friend of your old age.

She's a female, this city, your female.

And you love her.

But you wish she'd change her deodorant and take a bath, because she's dirty and she stinks.

The squadroom was hot, August hot, and Melvin Melvin's bald pate glistened with sweat.

Melvin Melvin was a good cop. He was proud of being a good cop, and he thought he knew why he was a good cop. He was patient. Melvin Melvin thought he was one of the most

patient men in the world, certainly one of the most patient cops. One of Melvin's father's ill-advised practical jokes—one of his more permanent jokes—had left Melvin with a name that was bound to draw gags, taunts, and boyhood beatings, like corpses draw insects. Melvin was thankful his name had at least taught him tolerance and patience and left no visible scars except a totally bald head that had been devoid of hair since he was twenty-eight.

Melvin's philosophical bent made him thankful for another small blessing regarding his nomenclature—no one had ever found out his middle name.

It was Melvin.

Melvin Melvin Melvin.

Ridiculous.

"Say, Melvin," said Mascara, from the clerical office.

"What is it?" said Melvin. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Do you want coffee?"

"Sure I want coffee. I got nothing better to do in this lousy precinct but drink your lousy coffee. All I do is sit around all day and guzzle your coffee, because all you do all day in that crumby clerical office of yours is make coffee. And for a guy who makes coffee all day, you sure make the goddamnedest putrid coffee, you know that?"

"Sure, Melvin. You want coffee?"

"Yeah, I want coffee. Didn't I say so?"

"I guess so. You know what, Melvin?"

"What?"

"You should try to be more patient."

"More patient? I'm the patientest cop in this whole stinking 97th Precinct. Doesn't everybody say so?"

"Yeah, they do, Melvin. I never could figure that out."

"Ah, you're just like my father."

The phone on Melvin's desk rang.

"Ninety-seventh. Melvin."

"This is Ella Anders speaking. My husband Phil has just been murdered. Can you send someone over here right away?"

"Certainly, ma'am. Just take it slow. Now, what's the address, please?"

The Anders' address was a plush apartment in Itolja, overlooking the River Vix. The body of Phil Anders had been found on a rubdown table in a makeshift gymnasium opening onto the hallway. There was a knife in his chest.

Curt Bing and Houghton Claws were the two 97th detectives sent to investigate the murder. For the two of them to be paired was a rare

occurrence in the 97th Squad, for both were given to making the wrong moves, and each usually needed the steady influence of Steve Berella to function successfully. On this occasion it was hoped they would act as a steady influence on one another.

Bing, who was the youngest of the squad's detectives and looked even younger than he was, frequently antagonized suspects with his crude, tactless interrogation style. Houghton Claws, a huge, handsome man with streaks of red and black in his blond hair, was of so sporting a nature in dealing with dangerous criminals that he had frequently gotten his fellow detectives almost killed.

"What happened, ma'am?" Claws asked the widow.

"I was giving him a rubdown," said Ella Anders. "I give him a rubdown every day at two-thirty. I had gone in the next room to get a towel. I was gone just a few seconds. When I came back, there he was. With that thing in his chest."

"Was he dead when you came back into the room?"

"No, he was still alive, gasping for breath."

"Did he say anything?"

"Yes. He said 'Teddy Bear.' That was all. Then he died, and I called you."

"'Teddy Bear,'" repeated

Claws musingly. "Does that mean anything special to you, Mrs. Anders?"

"No, it doesn't. I don't understand what he meant."

"I see. Did your husband have any enemies?"

"No. No one. Everybody loved him."

"Come on, lady," said Curt Bing. "He's dead. Somebody killed him. He must have had one enemy. Unless you killed him. Did you kill him, Mrs. Anders?"

"How can you say such a thing?" said Ella Anders. "How can he say that?" she asked Claws.

"Let me handle this, will you, Curt?"

"Why did you kill him, Mrs. Anders? Jealousy?" Bing persisted.

"Curt, shut up! Can't I take you any place? Go out and wait in the car."

"Aw, come on, Houghton. That's no fun!"

"Just wait in the car, Curt."

"Aw, you're just like my father," Bing whimpered and ran out.

"I apologize for my partner, ma'am. He's young and has known great tragedy."

"I think I understand," said Ella Anders.

"Isn't there anyone your husband has quarreled with lately?"

"Well, there was one person. A Mr. Bridger was here yesterday, a Mr. Norville Bridger. He was ghost-writing a book for my husband about strength and health, but they couldn't agree about what should be included in the book. Phil was threatening to fire Bridger and get another ghost."

"It sounds like a slim motive for murder, but we'll look into it. Do you know Bridger's address?"

Ella Anders gave the address of a well-known magazine publisher in the skyscrapered business district of Itolja.

"Thank you. One more thing, Mrs. Anders. How did the murderer get into the room?"

"Anyone could have. The door that opens onto the hallway was unlocked. But there is one thing I cannot understand."

"What is that?"

"Why did the murderer take such a chance? I was talking to Phil from the next room all the time I was getting the towel. Why did the murderer take the chance of killing my husband when he knew there was a witness in the next room who might walk in on him at any moment?"

"That's a good point. We'll keep it in mind."

As the technicians and photographers worked with the

body, Houghton Claws said goodbye to Ella Anders, giving her hand a comforting squeeze. He had fallen hopelessly in love with the widow the moment he had entered the makeshift gym, but his innate sense of decency, ingrained in him by his father, who was a minister, made him decide to wait a couple of days after her husband's murder before going to bed with her.

Houghton Claws was that kind of a cop.

Houghton Claws was a gentleman.

"All you Chinese look alike to me," said Melvin Melvin.

Handsome, dark, oriental-looking Steve Berella smiled good-naturedly. "You know I'm Italian, Melvin."

"Well, all you Chinese Italians look alike to me."

"Yeah. We make spaghetti that you're hungry half an hour after." Steve got to his feet. "I'm going home, Melvin, before you find some reason to keep me here."

"If I could go home to what you got to go home to," said Melvin, "I wouldn't be sitting around making ethnic jokes about bald Eskimos."

"Eskimo? I thought you were Jewish, Melvin."

"Sure, my wife makes chicken soup in our igloo. Say, Steve, you heard about this

Anders case?"

Berella was nearing the door of the squadroom. "Sure, I heard about it."

"It's hilariously funny."

"Funny? How?"

"It's a dying massage case. You never heard of a dying massage?"

"You're a riot, Melvin. See you."

"So long, Steve," said Melvin, patiently.

Norville A. Bridger, as the door of his office proclaimed, appeared to be doing very well as an employee of the biggest magazine chain in Itolja. Well enough that it seemed doubtful he'd kill a man who threatened to fire him from a not too promising ghosting job.

As Houghton Claws was talking to Bridger, he was hoping to cut the interview short and get back to Bridger's secretary, with whom he'd fallen hopelessly in love at first sight and whom he hoped to seduce by nightfall.

"Now, just what is it you do here, Mr. Bridger?"

"I cut novels. Several of our magazines regularly run condensations of new novels before their publication in hardcover."

"And this is a full-time job, Mr. Bridger?" asked Claws, interested despite his other preoccupation.

"You might be very surprised at what a demanding job it is, Mr. Claws. Cutting books is an art. I had a friend who was in this business and could never get the hang of it. He cut mystery novels for a slick-paper women's magazine. There was one of their regular writers whose books were fairly easy to cut—for a pro, I mean. He usually had about 1,500 words worth of plot which he'd beef up to novel length with all kinds of descriptions and character analyses. Well, this friend of mine fell in love with the guy's prose so much that he'd leave in the descriptive passages and cut out half the plot instead. In one story it turned out that the murderer wasn't even a character in the story—my friend had cut him out completely."

"That must have made it confusing to the reader."

"It did."

"What's your friend doing now?"

"He was with *Reader's Digest* briefly but then after the fire—"

"What fire?"

"He ran amok and burned the complete works of Evan Hunter one night. It was the biggest conflagration in the history of Pleasantville, New York."

"I see. Well, this is all very

interesting, Mr. Bridger, but I'd like to hear about the quarrel you had with Mr. Anders."

"Oh, it was nothing at all. I just couldn't make his fool book long enough for him. It's my training here, I guess. He had only about fifty pages worth of ideas and I had it all said in twenty. Ghosting books is a dirty business. I much prefer being a cutter."

Steve Berella was bleeding and wondering why.

Not why he was bleeding. He was bleeding because someone had smashed the side of his head in with a bottle. And his belly ached because someone had kicked him there repeatedly.

The feel and taste and smell of blood were easy to explain. So was the aching gut.

But Steve Berella was wondering why he had become a cop. Was it his job to collect the city's human trash? Was it his duty to clean the stains off her shimmering spires? Was it his job to maintain the Chamber of Commerce's facade of respectability? Was it his job to get bottles smashed over his head and get kicked in the gut? Repeatedly? In his own apartment?

Steve Berella thought about it and decided he was glad he was a cop.

But he wished he could stop bleeding.

On the carpet.

He kept bleeding for a while.

Blood is messy.

Curt Bing sat in the squadroom, drinking Mascara's coffee and examining the contents of Phil Anders' billfold. There was no lead to Teddy Bear.

Bing fingered Anders' social security card, his oil company credit card, his Diners Club credit card, his American Express credit card, his five department store credit cards, and his public library card.

(*NOTE: Insert here facsimiles of Anders' social security card, oil company credit card, Diners Club credit card, American Express credit card, five department store credit cards, and public library card.*)

There was no lead.

"There's no lead, Melvin. I don't understand it."

"Be patient, kid, like I am."

"This is getting us nowhere. I feel I should be out questioning somebody."

"NO! Not that. You can do better here. Keep mulling over that billfold and something will come to you."

Bing pouted thoughtfully.

Mascara poked his head out of the clerical office. "More coffee, Melvin?"

"Mascara, you want me to tell you what you can do with your lousy coffee?"

"Okay, if you don't want any, say so. Melvin, with everybody else you're so patient. Why can't you be patient with me? Huh?"

"Mascara, you just can't make coffee, that's all." Besides that, Mascara reminded him of his father. "Why don't you go to some friendly neighborhood market and get some friendly little old grocer to tell you what you're doing wrong, huh? That's what my wife did."

"Sure, Melvin. More coffee, Curt?"

"I don't think—hey, wait a minute! I've got it! I just cracked the Anders case!"

Curt Bing reached for the telephone and began dialing the Anders apartment. Melvin cringed.

"Hello, Mrs. Anders? This is Detective Bing of the 97th Squad... Who is this? Houghton? What the hell are you doing there?... What do you mean it's none of my business?"

"Well, put Mrs. Anders on. I won't insult her, Houghton. Honest... Oh, all right. Ask her if she's sure all her husband said when he died was 'Teddy Bear.' Were those his exact words? This is very important."

There was a lengthy pause. "Yeah? That's not quite all he

said? He said her name, too? He said 'Ella'? That's just what I was hoping, Houghton. I'll explain later, Houghton. You and Mrs. Anders can get back to whatever it was you were doing. Goodbye."

Bing hung up the phone and leaped out of his chair.

"Do you get it, Melvin? He said, 'Teddy Bear, Ella'—at least, that's what she thought he said. But she thought the Ella part was just her name, so she dropped it from the message when she told us about it. But it *was* part of the message. What he really said was—"

"Teddy Berella?" said Melvin incredulously. "You mean

Steve's deaf and dumb wife? She did it?"

"Sure. That's why she didn't hear Mrs. Anders talking in the next room. She's deaf and dumb. She didn't know danger was nearby. It all fits, Melvin!"

"But, Curt, she has no connection with the case. She hasn't even come into the thing. And why in the world did she do it, Curt?"

Curt Bing shrugged his youthful shoulders. "I don't know, Melvin. I guess we'll just have to wait until the hardcover edition comes out this fall."

Melvin nodded his bald head, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and gave thanks for his patience.



**Ed McBain**

## The Empty Hours

*She was living in a \$60-a-month furnished room—a cheap place to live in and to die in. Yet she had two healthy bank accounts, one with deposits totaling almost \$60,000... In a sense it was the only clue the Homicide Squad of the 87th Precinct had. The lab report had told them very little, and the coroner had fixed the cause of death as strangulation, which really didn't tell them much—Detectives Steve Carella and Cotton Hawes had seen that for themselves... .*

*One of Ed McBain's best police procedurals—a short novel complete in this anthology... .*

### Detectives: HOMICIDE SQUAD of the 87th Precinct

They thought she was colored at first.

The patrolman who investigated the complaint didn't expect to find a dead woman. This was the first time he'd seen a corpse, and he was somewhat shaken by the ludicrously relaxed grotesqueness of the girl lying on her back on the rug, and his hand trembled a little as he made out his report. But when he came to the blank line calling for an identification of RACE, he unhesitatingly wrote "Negro."

The call had been taken at Headquarters by a patrolman in the Central Complaint Bureau.

He sat at a desk with a pad of printed forms before him, and he copied down the information, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, rolled the form and slipped it into a metal carrier, and then shot it by pneumatic tube to the radio room. A dispatcher there read the complaint form, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, studied the precinct map on the wall opposite his desk, and then dispatched car eleven of the 87th Precinct to the scene.

The girl was dead.

She may have been a pretty

girl, but she was hideous in death, distorted by the expanding gases inside her skin case. She was wearing a sweater and skirt, and she was barefoot, and her skirt had pulled back when she fell on the rug. Her head was twisted at a curious angle, the short black hair cradled by the rug, her eyes open and brown in a bloated face.

The patrolman felt a sudden impulse to pull the girl's skirt down over her knees. He knew, suddenly, she would have wanted this. Death had caught her in this indecent posture, robbing her of female instinct. There were things this girl would never do again, so many things, all of which must have seemed enormously important to the girl herself. But the single universal thing was an infinitesimal detail, magnified now by death: she would never again perform the simple feminine and somehow beautiful act of pulling her skirt down over her knees.

The patrolman sighed and finished his report. The image of the dead girl remained in his mind all the way down to the squad car.

It was hot in the squadroom on that night in early August. The men working the graveyard shift had reported for duty at

6:00 P.M., and they would not go home until eight the following morning. They were all detectives and perhaps privileged members of the police force, but there were many policemen—Detective Meyer Meyer among them—who maintained that a uniformed cop's life made a hell of a lot more sense than a detective's.

"Sure, it does," Meyer insisted now, sitting at his desk in his shirt sleeves. "A patrolman's schedule provides regularity and security. It gives a man a home life."

"This squadroom is your home, Meyer," Carella said. "Admit it."

"Sure," Meyer answered, grinning. "I can't wait to come to work each day." He passed a hand over his bald pate. "You know what I like especially about this place? The interior decoration. The décor. It's very restful."

"Oh, you don't like your fellow workers, huh?" Carella said. He slid off the desk and winked at Cotton Hawes, who was standing at one of the filing cabinets. Then he walked toward the water cooler at the other end of the room, just inside the slatted railing that divided squadroom from corridor. He moved with a nonchalant ease that was deceptive. Steve Carella had

never been one of those weight-lifting goons, and the image he presented was hardly one of bulging muscular power. But there was a quiet strength about the man and the way he moved, a confidence in the way he casually accepted the capabilities and limitations of his body. He stopped at the water cooler, filled a paper cup, and turned to look at Meyer again.

"No, I like my colleagues," Meyer said. "In fact, Steve, if I had my choice in all the world of who to work with, I would choose you honorable, decent guys. Sure." Meyer nodded, building steam. "In fact, I'm thinking of having some medals cast, so I can hand them out to you guys. Boy, am I lucky to have this job! I may come to work without pay from now on. I may just refuse my salary, this job is so enriching. I want to thank you guys. You make me recognize the real values in life."

"He makes a nice speech," Hawes said.

"He should run the line-up. It would break the monotony. How come you don't run the line-up, Meyer?"

"Steve, I been offered the job," Meyer said seriously. "I told them I'm needed right here at the Eighty-seventh, the garden spot of all the precincts. Why, they offered me chief of

detectives, and when I said no, they offered me commissioner, but I was loyal to the squad."

"Let's give *him* a medal," Hawes said, and the telephone rang.

Meyer lifted the receiver. "Eighty-seventh Squad, Detective Meyer. What? Yeah, just a second." He pulled a pad into place and began writing. "Yeah, I got it. Right. Right. Okay." He hung up. Carella had walked to his desk. "A little colored girl," Meyer said.

"Yeah?"

"In a furnished room on South Eleventh."

"Yeah?"

"Dead," Meyer said.

The city doesn't seem to be itself in the very early hours of the morning.

She is a woman, of course, and time will never change that. She awakes as a woman, tentatively touching the day in a yawning, smiling stretch, her lips free of color, her hair tousled, warm from sleep, her body richer, an innocent girlish quality about her as sunlight stains the eastern sky and covers her with early heat.

She dresses in furnished rooms in crumby rundown slums, and she dresses in Hall Avenue penthouses, and in the countless apartments that crowd the buildings of Isola and

Riverhead and Calm's Point, in the private houses that line the streets of Bethtown and Majesta, and she emerges a different woman, sleek and businesslike, attractive but not sexy, a look of utter competence about her, manicured and polished, but with no time for nonsense; there is a long working day ahead of her.

At five o'clock a metamorphosis takes place. She does not change her costume, this city, this woman, she wears the same frock or the same suit, the same high-heeled pumps or the same suburban loafers, but something breaks through that immaculate shell, a mood, a tone, an undercurrent. She is a different woman who sits in the bars and cocktail lounges, who relaxes on the patios or on the terraces shelving the skyscrapers, a different woman with a somewhat lazily-inviting grin, a somewhat tired expression, an impenetrable knowledge on her face and in her eyes: she lifts her glass, she laughs gently, the evening sits expectantly on the skyline, the sky is awash with the purple of day's end.

She turns female in the night.

She drops her femininity and turns female. The polish is gone, the mechanized competence; she becomes a little

scatterbrained and a little cuddly; she crosses her legs recklessly and allows her lipstick to be kissed clear off her mouth, and she responds to the male hands on her body, and she turns soft and inviting and miraculously primitive. The night is a female time, and the city is nothing but a woman.

And in the empty hours she sleeps, and she does not seem to be herself.

In the morning she will awake again and touch the silent air in a yawn, spreading her arms, the contented smile on her naked mouth. Her hair will be mussed, we will know her, we have seen her this way often.

But now she sleeps. She sleeps silently, this city. Oh, an eye open in the buildings of the night here and there, winking on, off again, silence. She rests. In sleep we do not recognize her. Her sleep is not like death, for we can hear and sense the murmur of life beneath the warm bedclothes. But she is a strange woman whom we have known intimately, loved passionately, and now she curls into an unresponsive ball beneath the sheet, and our hand is on her rich hip. We can feel life there, but we do not know her.

She is faceless and featureless in the dark. She could be

any city, any woman, anywhere. We touch her uncertainty. She has pulled the black nightgown of early morning around her, and we do not know her. She is a stranger, and her eyes are closed . . .

The landlady was frightened by the presence of policemen, even though she had summoned them. The taller one, the one who called himself Detective Hawes, was a redheaded giant with a white streak in his hair, a horror if she'd ever seen one. The landlady stood in the apartment where the girl lay dead on the rug, and she talked to the detectives in whispers, not because she was in the presence of death, but only because it was three o'clock in the morning.

The landlady was wearing a bathrobe over her gown. There was an intimacy to the scene, the same intimacy that hangs alike over an impending fishing trip or a completed tragedy. Three A.M. is a time for slumber, and those who are awake while the city sleeps share a common bond that makes them friendly aliens.

"What's the girl's name?" Carella asked. It was three o'clock in the morning, and he had not shaved since 5 P.M. the day before, but his chin looked smooth. His eyes slanted

slightly downward, combining with his clean-shaven face to give him a curiously oriental appearance. The landlady liked him. He was a nice boy, she thought. In her lexicon the men of the world were either "nice boys" or "louses." She wasn't sure about Cotton Hawes yet, but she imagined he was a parasitic insect.

"Claudia Davis," she answered, directing the answer to Carella whom she liked, and totally ignoring Hawes who had no right to be so big a man with a frightening white streak in his hair.

"Do you know how old she was?" Carella asked.

"Twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I think."

"Had she been living here long?"

"Since June," the landlady said.

"That short a time, huh?"

"And *this* has to happen," the landlady said. "She seemed like such a nice girl. Who do you suppose did it?"

"I don't know," Carella said.

"Or do you think it was suicide? I don't smell no gas; do you?"

"No," Carella said. "Do you know where she lived before this, Mrs. Maudèr?"

"No, I don't."

"You didn't ask for references?"

"It's only a furnished room," Mrs. Mauder said, shrugging. "She paid me a month's rent in advance."

"How much was that, Mrs. Mauder?"

"Sixty dollars. She paid it in cash. I never take checks from strangers."

"But you have no idea whether she's from this city, or out of town, or whatever. Am I right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Davis," Hawes said, shaking his head. "That'll be a tough name to track down, Steve. Must be a thousand of them in the phone book."

"Why is your hair white?" the landlady asked.

"Huh?"

"That streak."

"Oh." Hawes unconsciously touched his left temple. "I got knifed once," he said, dismissing the question abruptly. "Mrs. Mauder, was the girl living alone?"

"I don't know. I mind my own business."

"Well, surely you would have seen . . ."

"I think she was living alone. I don't pry, and I don't spy. She gave me a month's rent in advance."

Hawes sighed. He could feel the woman's hostility. He decided to leave the questioning to Carella. "I'll take a look

through the drawers and closets," he said, and moved off without waiting for Carella's answer.

"It's awfully hot in here," Carella said.

"The patrolman said we shouldn't touch anything until you got here," Mrs. Mauder said. "That's why I didn't open the windows or nothing."

"That was very thoughtful of you," Carella said, smiling.

"But I think we can open the window now, don't you?"

"If you like. It does smell in here. Is—is that her? Smelling?"

"Yes," Carella answered. He pulled open the window.

"There. That's a little better."

"Doesn't help much," the landlady said. "The weather's been terrible—just terrible. Body can't sleep at all." She looked down at the dead girl. "She looks just awful, don't she?"

"Yes. Mrs. Mauder, would you know where she worked, or if she had a job?"

"No, I'm sorry."

"Anyone ever come by asking for her? Friends? Relatives?"

"No, I'm sorry. I never saw any."

"Can you tell me anything about her habits? When she left the house in the morning? When she returned at night?"

"I'm sorry. I never noticed."

"Well, what made you think something was wrong in here?"

"The milk. Outside the door. I was out with some friends tonight, you see, and when I came back a man on the third floor called down to say his neighbor was playing the radio very loud and would I tell him to shut up, please. So I went upstairs and asked him to turn down the radio, and then I passed Miss Davis' apartment and saw the milk standing outside the door, and I thought this was kind of funny in such hot weather, but I figured it was *her* milk, you know, and I don't like to pry. So I came down and went to bed, but I couldn't stop thinking about that milk standing outside in the hallway. So I put on a robe and came upstairs and knocked on the door, and she didn't answer. So I called out to her, and she still didn't answer. So I figured something must be wrong. I don't know why. I just figured . . . I don't know. If she was in here, why didn't she answer?"

"How'd you know she was here?"

"I didn't."

"Was the door locked?"

"Yes."

"You tried it?"

"Yes. It was locked."

"I see," Carella said.

"Couple of cars just pulled

up downstairs," Hawes said, walking over. "Probably the lab. And Homicide South."

"They know the squeal is ours," Carella said. "Why do they bother?"

"Make it look good," Hawes said. "Homicide's got the title on the door, so they figure they ought to go out and earn their salaries."

"Did you find anything?"

"A brand-new set of luggage in the closet, six pieces. The drawers and closets are full of clothes. Most of them look new. Lots of resort stuff, Steve. Found some brand-new books, too."

"What else?"

"Some mail on the dresser."

"Anything we can use?"

Hawes shrugged. "A statement from the girl's bank. Bunch of canceled checks. Might help us."

"Maybe," Carella said. "Let's see what the lab comes up with."

The laboratory report came the next day, together with a necropsy report. In combination, the reports were fairly valuable. The first thing the detectives learned was that the girl was a white Caucasian of approximately thirty years of age.

Yes, white.

The news came as something

of a surprise to the cops because the girl lying on the rug had certainly looked like a Negress. After all, her skin was black. Not tan, not coffee-colored, not brown, but black—that intensely black coloration found on primitive tribes who spend a good deal of their time in the sun. The conclusion seemed to be a logical one, but death is a great equalizer not without a whimsical humor all its own, and the funniest kind of joke is a sight gag. Death changes white to black, and when that grisly old man comes marching in there's no question of who's going to school with whom. There's no longer any question of pigmentation, friend. That girl on the floor looked black, but she was white, and whatever else she was she was also stone-cold dead, and that's the worst you can do to anybody.

The report explained that the girl's body was in a state of advanced putrefaction, and it went into such esoteric terms as "general distention of the body cavities, tissues, and blood vessels with gas," and "black discoloration of the skin, mucous membranes, and irides caused by hemolysis and action of hydrogen sulfide on the blood pigment," all of which broke down to the simple fact that it was a damn hot week in

August and the girl had been lying on a rug which retained heat and speeded the post-mortem putrefaction. From what they could tell, and in weather like this it was mostly a guess, the girl had been dead and decomposing for at least forty-eight hours, which set the time of her demise as August first or thereabouts.

One of the reports went on to say that the clothes she'd been wearing had been purchased in one of the city's larger department stores. All her clothes—those she wore and those found in her apartment—were rather expensive, but someone at the lab thought it necessary to note that all her panties were trimmed with Belgian lace and retailed for \$25 a pair. Someone else at the lab mentioned that a thorough examination of her garments and body revealed no traces of blood, semen, or oil stains.

The coroner fixed the cause of death as strangulation.

It is amazing how much an apartment can sometimes yield to science. It is equally amazing, and more than a little disappointing, to get nothing from the scene of a murder when you are desperately seeking a clue. The furnished room in which Claudia Davis had been strangled to death was

full of juicy surfaces conceivably carrying hundreds of latent fingerprints. The closets and drawers contained piles of clothing that might have carried traces of anything from gunpowder to face powder.

But the lab boys went around lifting their prints and sifting their dust and vacuuming with a Söderman-Heuberger filter, and they went down to the morgue and studied the girl's skin and came up with a total of nothing. Zero. Oh, not quite zero. They got a lot of prints belonging to Claudia Davis, and a lot of dust collected from all over the city and clinging to her shoes and her furniture.

They also found some documents belonging to the dead girl—a birth certificate, a diploma of graduation from a high school in Santa Monica, and an expired library card. And, oh, yes, a key. The key didn't seem to fit any of the locks in the room. They sent all the junk over to the 87th, and Sam Grossman called Carella personally later that day to apologize for the lack of results.

The squadroom was hot and noisy when Carella took the call from the lab. The conversation was a curiously one-sided affair. Carella, who had dumped the contents of the laboratory envelope onto his desk, merely

grunted or nodded every now and then. He thanked Grossman at last, hung up, and stared at the window facing the street and Grover Park.

"Get anything?" Meyer asked.

"Yeah. Grossman thinks the killer was wearing gloves."

"That's nice," Meyer said.

"Also, I think I know what this key is for." He lifted it from the desk.

"Yeah? What?"

"Well, did you see these canceled checks?"

"No."

"Take a look," Carella said.

He opened the brown bank envelope addressed to Claudia Davis, spread the canceled checks on his desk top, and then unfolded the yellow bank statement. Meyer studied the display silently.

"Cotton found the envelope in her room," Carella said. "The statement covers the month of July. Those are all the checks she wrote, or at least everything that cleared the bank by the thirty-first."

"Lots of checks here," Meyer said. "Twenty-five, to be exact. What do you think?"

"I know what I think," Carella said.

"What's that?"

"I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary. Everything

she did last month is right here, Meyer. All the department stores she went to, look, a florist, her hairdresser, a candy shop, even her shoemaker, and look at this. A check made out to a funeral home. Now who died, Meyer, huh? And look here. She was living at Mrs. Mauder's place, but here's a check made out to a swank apartment building on the South Side, in Stewart City. And some of these checks are just made out to names, *people*. This case is crying for some people."

"You want me to get the phone book?"

"No, wait a minute. Look at this bank statement. She opened the account on July fifth with a thousand bucks. All of a sudden, bam, she deposits a thousand bucks in the Seaboard Bank of America."

"What's so odd about that?"

"Nothing, maybe. But Cotton called the other banks in the city, and Claudia Davis has a very healthy account at the Highland Trust on Cromwell Avenue. And I mean *very* healthy."

"How healthy?"

"Close to sixty-grand."

"What!"

"You heard me. And the Highland Trust lists no withdrawals for the month of July. So where'd she get the money

to put into the Seaboard account?"

"Was that the only deposit?"

"Take a look."

Meyer picked up the statement.

"The initial deposit was on July fifth," Carella said. "A thousand bucks. She made another thousand-dollar deposit on July twelfth. And another on the nineteenth. And another on the twenty-seventh."

Meyer raised his eyebrows. "Four grand. That's a lot of loot."

"And all deposited in less than a month's time."

"Not to mention the sixty grand in the other bank. Where do you suppose she got it, Steve?"

"I don't know. It just doesn't make sense. She wears underpants trimmed with Belgian lace, but she lives in a crumby room-and-a-half with bath. How the hell do you figure that? Two bank accounts, twenty-five bucks to cover her backside, and all she pays is sixty bucks a month for a flophouse."

"Maybe she's hot, Steve."

"No." Carella shook his head. "I ran a make with C.B.I. She hasn't got a record, and she's not wanted for anything. I haven't heard from the Feds yet, but I imagine it'll be the same story."

"What about that key? You said—"

"Oh, yeah. That's pretty simple, thank God. Look at this."

He reached into the pile of checks and sorted out a yellow slip, larger than the checks. He handed it to Meyer. The slip read:

### THE SEABOARD BANK OF AMERICA

Isola Branch

P 1698

July 5

We are charging your account as per items below. Please see that the amount is deducted on your books so that our accounts may agree.

FOR Safe deposit rental #375

|  |   |    |
|--|---|----|
|  | 5 | 00 |
|  |   | 50 |
|  |   |    |
|  | 5 | 50 |

U.S. Tax

AMOUNT OF CHARGE

CHARGE Claudia Davis

ENTERED BY

1263 South Eleventh

BPL

Isola

"She rented a safe-deposit box the same day she opened the new checking account, huh?" Meyer said.

"Right."

"What's in it?"

"That's a good question."

"Look, do you want to save some time, Steve?"

"Sure."

"Let's get the court order before we go to the bank."

The manager of the Seaboard Bank of America was a bald-headed man in his early fifties. Working on the theory that similar physical types are

*simpatico*, Carella allowed Meyer to do most of the questioning.

It was not easy to elicit answers from Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, because he was by nature a reticent man. But Detective Meyer was the most patient man in the city, if not the entire world. His patience was an acquired trait, rather than an inherited one. Oh, he had inherited a few things from his father, a jovial man named Max Meyer, but patience was not one of them. If anything, Max Meyer had been a very

impatient if not downright short-tempered sort of fellow. When his wife, for example, came to him with the news that she was expecting a baby, Max nearly hit the ceiling. He enjoyed little jokes immensely, was perhaps the biggest practical joker in all Riverhead, but this particular prank of nature failed to amuse him. He had thought his wife was long past the age when bearing children was even a remote possibility. He never thought of himself as approaching dotage, but he was after all getting on in years, and a change-of-life baby was hardly what the doctor had ordered. He allowed the impending birth to simmer inside him, planning his revenge all the while, plotting the practical joke to end all practical jokes.

When the baby was born, he named it Meyer, a delightful handle which when coupled with the family name provided the infant with a double-barreled monicker: Meyer Meyer.

Now, that's pretty funny. Admit it. You can split your sides laughing over that one, unless you happen to be a pretty sensitive kid who also happens to be an Orthodox Jew, and who happens to live in a predominately Gentile neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood thought Meyer Meyer had been invented solely

for their own pleasure. If they needed further provocation for beating him up, and they didn't need any, his name provided excellent motivational fuel. "Meyer Meyer, Jew on fire!" they would shout, and then they would chase him down the street and beat hell out of him.

Meyer learned patience. It is not very often that one kid, or even one grown man, can successfully defend himself against a gang. But sometimes you can talk yourself out of a beating. Sometimes, if you're patient, if you just wait long enough, you can catch one of them alone and stand up to him face to face, man to man, and know the exultation of a fair fight without the frustration of overwhelming odds.

Listen, Max Meyer's joke was a harmless one. You can't deny an old man his pleasure. But Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, was fifty-four years old and totally bald. Meyer Meyer, the detective second grade who sat opposite him and asked questions, was also totally bald. Maybe a lifetime of devoted patience doesn't leave any scars. Maybe not. But Meyer Meyer was only thirty-seven years old.

Patiently he said, "Didn't you find these large deposits rather odd, Mr. Anderson?"

"No," Anderson said. "A

thousand dollars is not a lot of money."

"Mr. Anderson," Meyer said patiently, "you are aware, of course, that banks in this city are required to report to the police any unusually large sums of money deposited at one time. You are aware of that, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"Miss Davis deposited four thousand dollars in three weeks' time. Didn't that seem unusual to you?"

"No. The deposits were spaced. A thousand dollars is not a lot of money, and not an unusually large deposit."

"To me," Meyer said, "a thousand dollars is a lot of money. You can buy a lot of beer with a thousand dollars."

"I don't drink beer," Anderson said flatly.

"Neither do I," Meyer answered.

"Besides, we *do* call the police whenever we get a very large deposit, unless the depositor is one of our regular customers. I did not feel these deposits warranted such a call."

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson," Meyer said. "We have a court order here. We'd like to open the box Miss Davis rented."

"May I see the order, please?" Anderson said. Meyer showed it to him. Anderson sighed and said, "Very well. Do

you have Miss Davis' key?"

Carella reached into his pocket. "Would this be it?" he said. He put a key on the desk. It was the key that had come to him from the lab together with the documents they'd found in the apartment.

"Yes, that's it," Mr. Anderson said. "There are two different keys to every box, you see. The bank keeps one, and the renter keeps the other. The box cannot be opened without both keys. Will you come with me, please?"

He collected the bank key to safety-deposit box number 375 and led the detectives to the rear of the bank. The room seemed to be lined with shining metal. The boxes, row upon row, reminded Carella of the morgue and the refrigerated shelves that slid in and out of the wall on squeaking rollers.

Anderson pushed the bank key into a slot and turned it, and then he put Claudia Davis' key into a second slot and turned that. He pulled the long, thin box out of the wall and handed it to Meyer who carried it to the counter on the opposite wall and lifted the catch.

"Okay?" he said to Carella.

"Go ahead."

Meyer raised the lid of the box.

There was \$16,000 in the

box. There was also a slip of notepaper. The \$16,000 was neatly divided into four stacks of bills. Three of the stacks held \$5,000 each. The fourth stack held only \$1,000. Carella picked up the slip of paper. Someone, presumably Claudia Davis, had made some annotations on it in pencil.

|      |        |
|------|--------|
| 7/5  | 20,000 |
| 7/5  | -1,000 |
|      | 19,000 |
| 7/12 | -1,000 |
|      | 18,000 |
| 7/19 | -1,000 |
|      | 17,000 |
| 7/27 | -1,000 |
|      | 16,000 |

"Make any sense to you, Mr. Anderson?"

"No. I'm afraid not."

"She came into this bank on July fifth with twenty thousand dollars in cash, Mr. Anderson. She put a thousand of that into a checking account and the remainder into this box. The dates on this slip of paper show exactly when she took cash from the box and transferred it to the checking account. She knew the rules, Mr. Anderson.

She knew that twenty grand deposited in one lump would bring a call to the police. That way was a lot safer."

"We'd better get a list of these serial numbers," Meyer said.

"Would you have one of your people do that for us, Mr. Anderson?"

Anderson seemed ready to protest. Instead, he looked at Carella, sighed, and said, "Of course."

The serial numbers didn't help them at all. They compared them against their own lists, and the out-of-town lists, and the F.B.I. lists, but none of those bills was hot.

Only August was.

Stewart City hangs in the hair of Isola like a jeweled tiara. Not really a city, not even a town, merely a collection of swank apartment buildings overlooking the River Dix, the community had been named after British royalty and remained one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in town. If you could boast of a Stewart City address, you could also boast of a high income, a country place on Sands Spit, and a Mercedes-Benz in the garage under the apartment building. You could give your address with a measure of snobbery and pride—you were,

after all, one of the élite.

The dead girl named Claudia Davis had made out a check to Management Enterprises, Inc., at 13 Stewart Place South, to the tune of \$750. The check had been dated July ninth, four days after she'd opened the Seaboard account.

A cool breeze was blowing in off the river as Carella and Hawes pulled up. Late-afternoon sunlight dappled the polluted water of the Dix. The bridges connecting Calm's Point with Isola hung against a sky awaiting the assault of dusk.

"Want to pull down the sun visor?" Carella said.

Hawes reached up and turned down the visor. Clipped to the visor so that it showed through the windshield of the car was a hand-lettered card that read POLICEMAN ON DUTY CALL-87TH PRECINCT. The car, a 1956 Chevrolet, was Carella's own.

"I've got to make a sign for my car," Hawes said. "Some wise guy tagged it last week."

"What did you do?"

"I went to court and pleaded not guilty. On my day off."

"Did you get out of it?"

"Sure. I was answering a squeal. It's bad enough I had to use my own car, but for Pete's sake, to get a ticket!"

"I prefer my own car," Carella said. "Those three cars

belonging to the squad are ready for the junk heap."

"Two," Hawes corrected. "One of them's been in the police garage for a month now."

"Meyer went down to see about it the other day."

"What'd they say? Was it ready?"

"No, the mechanic told him there were four patrol cars ahead of the sedan, and they took precedence. Now, how about that?"

"Sure, it figures. I've still got a chit in for the gas I used, you know that?"

"Forget it. I've never got back a cent I laid out for gas."

"What'd Meyer do about the car?"

"He slipped the mechanic five bucks. Maybe that'll speed him up."

"You know what the city ought to do?" Hawes said. "They ought to buy some of those used taxicabs. Pick them up for two or three hundred bucks, paint them over, and give them out to the squads. Some of them are still in pretty good condition."

"Well, it's an idea," Carella said dubiously, and they entered the building. They found Mrs. Miller, the manager, in an office at the rear of the ornate entrance lobby. She was a woman in her early forties with

a well-preserved figure and a very husky voice. She wore her hair piled on the top of her head, a pencil stuck rakishly into the reddish-brown heap. She looked at the photostated check and said, "Oh, yes, of course."

"You knew Miss Davis?"

"Yes, she lived here for a long time."

"How long?"

"Five years."

"When did she move out?"

"At the end of June." Mrs. Miller crossed her splendid legs and smiled graciously. The legs were remarkable for a woman of her age, and the smile was almost radiant. She moved with an expert femininity, a calculated conscious fluidity of flesh that suggested availability and yet was totally respectable. She seemed to have devoted a lifetime to learning the ways and wiles of the female and now practiced them with facility and charm. She was pleasant to be with, this woman, pleasant to watch and to hear, and to think of touching. Carella and Hawes, charmed to their shoes, found themselves relaxing in her presence.

"This check," Carella said, tapping the photostat. "What was it for?"

"June rent. I received it on the tenth of July. Claudia

always paid her rent by the tenth of the month. She was a very good tenant."

"The apartment cost seven hundred and fifty dollars a month?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that high for an apartment?"

"Not in Stewart City," Mrs. Miller said gently. "And this was a river-front apartment."

"I see. I take it Miss Davis had a good job."

"No, no, she doesn't have a job at all."

"Then how could she afford—?"

"Well, she's rather well off, you know."

"Where does she get the money, Mrs. Miller?"

"Well . . ." Mrs. Miller shrugged. "I really think you should ask her, don't you? I mean, if this is something concerning Claudia, shouldn't you . . .?"

"Mrs. Miller," Carella said, "Claudia Davis is dead."

"What?"

"She's . . ."

"What? No. No." She shook her head. "Claudia? But the check . . . I . . . the check came only last month." She shook her head again. "No."

"She's dead, Mrs. Miller," Carella said gently. "She was strangled."

The charm faltered for just

an instant. Revulsion knifed the eyes of Mrs. Miller, the eyelids flickered, it seemed for an instant that the pupils would turn shining and wet, that the carefully lipsticked mouth would crumble. And then something inside took over, something that demanded control; something that reminded her that a charming woman does not weep and cause her fashionable eye make-up to run.

"I'm sorry," she said, almost in a whisper. "I am really, really sorry. She was a nice person."

"Can you tell us what you know about her, Mrs. Miller?"

"Yes. Yes, of course." She shook her head again, unwilling to accept the idea. "That's terrible. That's terrible. Why, she was only a baby."

"We figured her for thirty, Mrs. Miller. Are we wrong?"

"She seemed younger, but perhaps that was because . . . well, she was a rather shy person. Even when she first came here, there was an air of—well, lostness about her. Of course, that was right after her parents died, so—"

"Where did she come from, Mrs. Miller?"

"From California. Santa Monica."

Carella nodded. "You were starting to tell us—you said she was rather well off. Could you . . . ?"

"Well, the stock, you know."

"What stock?"

"Her parents had set up a securities trust account for her. When they died, Claudia began receiving the income from the stock. She was an only child, you know."

"And she lived on stock dividends alone?"

"They amounted to quite a bit. Which she saved, I might add. She was a very systematic person, not at all frivolous. When she received a dividend check, she would endorse it and take it straight to the bank. Claudia was a very sensible girl."

"Which bank, Mrs. Miller?"

"The Highland Trust. Right down the street. On Cromwell Avenue."

"I see," Carella said. "Was she dating many men? Would you know?"

"I don't think so. She kept pretty much to herself. Even after Josie came."

Carella leaned forward. "Josie? Who's Josie?"

"Josie Thompson. Josephine, actually. Her cousin."

"And where did she come from?"

"California. They both came from California."

"And how can we get in touch with this Josie Thompson?"

## THE EMPTY HOURS

"Well, . . . she . . . Don't you know? Haven't you . . .?" Mrs. Miller faltered.

"What, Mrs. Miller?"

"Why, Josie is dead. Josie passed on in June. That's why . . ."

Claudia moved, I suppose. I suppose she couldn't bear the thought of living in that apartment without Josie. It is a little frightening, isn't it?"

"Yes," Carella said,

| DETECTIVE DIVISION<br>SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT | SQUAD               | PRECINCT | PRECINCT<br>REPORT      | DETECTIVE DIVISION<br>REPORT NUMBER |
|--|---------------------|----------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| pdcn 360 rev 25m                           | 87                  | 87       | 32-101                  | DD 60 R-42                          |
| NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON REPORTING       |                     |          | DATE ORIGINAL<br>REPORT |                                     |
| Miller Irene (Mrs. John)                   | 13 Stewart Place S. |          |                         | 8-4-60                              |
| SURNAME                                    | GIVEN NAME          | INITIALS | NUMBER                  | STREET                              |

## DETAILS

Summary of interview with Irene (Mrs. John) Miller at office of Management Enterprises, Inc., address above, in re homicide Claudia Davis, Mrs. Miller states:

Claudia Davis came to this city in June of 1955, took \$750-a-month apartment above address, lived there alone. Rarely seen in company of friends, male or female. Young recluse type living on substantial income of inherited securities. Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carter Davis, killed on San Diego Freeway in head-on collision with station wagon, April 14, 1955. L.A.P.D. confirms traffic accident, driver of other vehicle convicted for negligent operation.

Mrs. Miller describes girl as medium height and weight, close-cropped brunette hair, brown eyes, no scars or birthmarks she can remember, talles with what we have on corpse. Further says Claudia Davis was quiet, unobtrusive tenant, paid rent and all service bills punctually, was gentle, sweet, plain, childlike, shy, meticulous in money matters, well liked but unapproachable.

In April or May of 1959, Josie Thompson, cousin of deceased, arrived from Brentwood, California. (Routine check with Criminal Bureau Identification negative, no record. Checking now with L.A.P.D., and F.B.I.) Described as slightly older than Claudia, rather different in looks and personality. "They were like black and white," Mrs. Miller says, "but they hit it off exceptionally well." Josie moved into the apartment with cousin. Words used to describe relationship between two were "like the closest sisters," and "really in tune," and "the best of friends," etc.

Girls did not date much, were constantly in each other's company, Josie seeming to pick up recluse habits from Claudia. Went on frequent trips together. Spent summer of '59 on Tortoise Island in the bay, returned Labor Day. Went away again at Christmas time to ski Sun Valley, and again in March this year to Kingston, Jamaica, for three weeks, returning at beginning of April. Source of income was fairly standard securities-income account. Claudia did not own the stock, but

income on it was hers for as long as she lived. Trust specified that upon her death the stock and the income be turned over to U.C.L.A. (father's alma mater). In any case, Claudia was assured of a very, very substantial lifetime income (see Highland Trust bank account) and was apparently supporting Josie as well, since Mrs. Miller claims neither girl worked. Brought up question of possible lesbianism, but Mrs. Miller, who is knowledgeable and hip, says no, neither girl was a dike.

On June 3, Josie and Claudia left for another weekend trip. Doorman reports having helped them pack valises into trunk of Claudia's car, 1960 Cadillac convertible. Claudia did the driving. Girls did not return on Monday morning as they had indicated they would. Claudia called on Wednesday, crying on telephone. Told Mrs. Miller that Josie had had a terrible accident and was dead. Mrs. Miller remembers asking Claudia if

she could help in any way. Claudia said, quote, No, everything's been taken care of already; unquote.

On June 17, Mrs. Miller received a letter from Claudia (letter attached—handwriting compares positive with checks Claudia signed) stating she could not possibly return to apartment, not after what had happened to her cousin. She reminded Mrs. Miller lease expired on July 4, told her she would send check for June rent before July 10. Said moving company would pack and pick up her belongings, delivering all valuables and documents to her, and storing rest. (See Claudia Davis' check number 010, 7/14, made payable to Allora Brothers, Inc., "in payment for packing, moving, and storage.")

Claudia Davis never returned to the apartment. Mrs. Miller had not seen her and knew nothing of her whereabouts until we informed her of the homicide.

## DATE OF THIS REPORT

August 6

Det 2/gr Carella S.L. 714-56-32 Det/Lt. Peter Byrnes

| RANK | SURNAME | INITIALS | SHIELD NUMBER | COMMANDING OFFICER |
|------|---------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
|------|---------|----------|---------------|--------------------|

The drive upstate to Triangle Lake was a particularly scenic one, and since it was August, and since Sunday was supposed to be Carella's day off, he thought he might just as well combine a little business with pleasure. So he put the top of the car down, and he packed Teddy into the front seat together with a picnic lunch and a gallon Thermos of iced coffee, and he forgot all about

Claudia Davis on the drive up through the mountains. Carella found it easy to forget about almost anything when he was with his wife.

Teddy as far as he was concerned—and his astute judgment had been backed up by many a street-corner whistle—was only the most beautiful woman in the world. He could never understand how he, a hairy, corny, ugly, stupid

clumsy cop, had managed to capture anyone as wonderful as Theodora Franklin. But capture her he had, and he sat beside her now in the open car and stole sidelong glances at her as he drove, excited as always by her very presence.

Her black hair, always wild, seemed to capture something of the wind's frenzy as it whipped about the oval of her face. Her brown eyes were partially squinted against the rush of air over the windshield. She wore a white blouse emphatically curved over a full bosom, black tapered slacks form-fitted over generous hips and good legs. She had kicked off her sandals and folded her knees against her breasts; her bare feet pressed against the glove-compartment panel. There was about her, Carella realized, a curious combination of savage and sophisticate. You never knew whether she was going to kiss you or slug you, and the uncertainty kept her eternally desirable and exciting.

Teddy watched her husband as he drove, his big-knuckled hands on the wheel of the car. She watched him not only because it gave her pleasure to watch him, but also because he was speaking. And since she could not hear, since she had been born a deaf mute, it was essential that she look at his

mouth when he spoke. He did not discuss the case at all. She knew that one of the Claudia Davis checks had been made out to the Fancher Funeral Home in Triangle Lake and she knew that Carella wanted to talk to the proprietor of the place personally. She further knew that this was very important or he wouldn't be spending his Sunday driving all the way upstate. But he had promised her he'd combine business with pleasure.

This was the pleasure part of the trip, and in deference to his promise and his wife, he refrained from discussing the case, which was really foremost in his mind. He talked, instead, about the scenery, and their plans for the fall, and the way the twins were growing, and how pretty Teddy looked, and how she'd better button that top button of her blouse before they got out of the car, but he never once mentioned Claudia Davis until they were standing in the office of the Fancher Funeral Home and looking into the gloomy eyes of a man who called himself Barton Scoles.

Scoles was tall and thin and he wore a black suit that he had probably worn to his own confirmation back in 1912. He was so much the stereotype of a small-town undertaker that Carella almost burst out laugh-

ing when he met him. Somehow, though, the environment was not conducive to hilarity. There was a strange smell hovering over the thick rugs and the papered walls and the hanging chandeliers. It was a while before Carella recognized it as formaldehyde and then made the automatic association and, curious for a man who had stared into the eyes of death so often, felt like retching.

"Miss Davis made out a check to you on July fifteenth," Carella said. "Can you tell me what it was for?"

"Sure can," Scoles said. "Had to wait a long time for that check. She gave me only a twenty-five-dollar deposit. Usually take fifty, you know. I got stuck many a time, believe me."

"How do you mean?" Carella asked.

"People. You bury their dead, and then sometimes they don't pay you for your work. This business isn't *all* fun, you know. Many's the time I handled the whole funeral and the service and the burial and all, and never did get paid. Makes you lose your faith in human nature."

"But Miss Davis finally *did* pay you."

"Oh, sure. But I can tell you I was sweating that one out. I can tell you that. After all, she

was a strange gal from the city, has the funeral here, nobody comes to it but her, sitting in the chapel out there and watching the body as if someone's going to steal it away, just her and the departed. I tell you, Mr. Carella—is that your name?"

"Yes, Carella."

"I tell you, it was kind of spooky. Lay there two days, she did, her cousin. And then Miss Davis asked that we bury the girl right here in the local cemetery, so I done that for her, too—all on the strength of a twenty-five-dollar deposit. That's trust, Mr. Carella, with a capital T."

"When was this, Mr. Scoles?"

"The girl drowned the first weekend in June," Scoles said. "Had no business being out on the lake so early, anyways. The water's still icy cold in June. Don't really warm up none till the latter part July. She fell over the side of the boat—she was out there rowing, you know—and that icy water probably froze her solid, or give her cramps or something, drowned her anyways." Scoles shook his head. "Had no business being out on the lake so early."

"Did you see a death certificate?"

"Yep, Dr. Donnelly made it

out. Cause of death was drowning, all right, no question about it. We had an inquest, too, you know. The Tuesday after she drowned. They said it was accidental."

"You said she was out rowing in a boat. Alone?"

"Yep. Her cousin, Miss Davis, was on the shore watching. Jumped in when she fell overboard, tried to reach her, but couldn't make it in time. The water's plenty cold, believe me. Ain't too warm even now, and here it is August already."

"But it didn't seem to affect Miss Davis, did it?"

"Well, she was probably a strong swimmer. Been my experience most pretty girls are strong girls, too. I'll bet your wife here is a strong girl. She sure is a pretty one."

Scoles smiled, and Teddy smiled and squeezed Carella's hand.

"About the payment," Carella said, "for the funeral and the burial. Do you have any idea why it took Miss Davis so long to send her check?"

"Nope. I wrote her twice. First time was just a friendly little reminder. Second time, I made it a little stronger. Attorney friend of mine in town wrote it on his stationery; that always impresses them. Didn't get an answer either

time. Finally, right out of the blue, the check came, payment in full. Beats me. Maybe she was affected by the death. Or maybe she's always slow paying her debts. I'm just happy the check came, that's all. Sometimes the live ones can give you more trouble than them who's dead, believe me."

They strolled down to the lake together, Carella and his wife, and ate their picnic lunch on its shores. Carella was strangely silent. Teddy dangled her bare feet in the water. The water, as Scoles had promised, was very cold even though it was August. On the way back from the lake Carella said, "Honey, would you mind if I make one more stop?"

Teddy turned her eyes to him inquisitively.

"I want to see the chief of police here."

Teddy frowned. The question was in her eyes, and he answered it immediately.

"To find out whether or not there were any witnesses to that drowning. *Besides* Claudia Davis, I mean. From the way Scoles was talking, I get the impression that lake was pretty deserted in June."

The chief of police was a short man with a potbelly and big feet. He kept his feet propped up on his desk all the

while he spoke to Carella. Carella watched him and wondered why everybody in this town seemed to be on vacation from an M-G-M movie. A row of rifles in a locked rack was behind the chief's desk. A host of WANTED fliers covered a bulletin board to the right of the rack. The chief had a hole in the sole of his left shoe.

"Yep," he said, "there was a witness, all right."

Carella felt a pang of disappointment. "Who?" he asked.

"Fellow fishing at the lake. Saw the whole thing. Testified before the coroner's jury."

"What'd he say?"

"Said he was fishing there when Josie Thompson took the boat out. Said Claudia Davis stayed behind, on the shore. Said Miss Thompson fell overboard and went under like a stone. Said Miss Davis jumped in the water and began swimming towards her. Didn't make it in time. That's what he said."

"What else did he say?"

"Well, he drove Miss Davis back to town in her car. 1960 Caddy convertible, I believe. She could hardly speak. She was sobbing and mumbling and wringing her hands, oh, in a hell of a mess. Why, we had to get the whole story out of that fishing fellow. Wasn't until the

next day that Miss Davis could make any kind of sense."

"When did you hold the inquest?"

"Tuesday. Day before they buried the cousin. Coroner did the dissection on Monday. We got authorization from Miss Davis, Penal Law 2213, next of kin being charged by law with the duty of burial may authorize dissection for the sole purpose of ascertaining the cause of death."

"And the coroner reported the cause of death as drowning?"

"That's right. Said so right before the jury."

"Why'd you have an inquest? Did you suspect something more than accidental drowning?"

"Not necessarily. But that fellow who was fishing, well *he* was from the city, too, you know. And for all we knew him and Miss Davis could have been in this together, you know, shoved the cousin over the side of the boat, and then faked up a whole story, you know. They both coulda been lying in their teeth."

"Were they?"

"Not so we could tell. You never seen anybody so grief-stricken as Miss Davis was when the fishing fellow drove her into town. Girl would have to be a hell of an actress to behave that

way. Calmed down the next day, but you shoulda seen her when it happened. And at the inquest it was plain this fishing fellow had never met her before that day at the lake. Convinced the jury he had no prior knowledge of or connection with either of the two girls. Convinced me, too, for that matter."

"What's his name?" Carella asked. "This fishing fellow."

"Courtenoy."

"What did you say?"

"Courtenoy. Sidney Courtenoy."

"Thanks," Carella answered, and he rose suddenly. "Come on, Teddy. I want to get back to the city."

Courtenoy lived in a one-family clapboard house in Riverhead. He was rolling up the door of his garage when Carella and Meyer pulled into his driveway early Monday morning. He turned to look at the car curiously, one hand on the rising garage door. The door stopped, halfway up, halfway down. Carella stepped into the driveway.

"Mr. Courtenoy?" he asked.

"Yes?" He stared at Carella, puzzlement on his face, the puzzlement that is always there when a perfect stranger addresses you by name. Courtenoy was a man in his late

forties, wearing a cap and a badly fitted sports jacket and dark flannel slacks. His hair was graying at the temples. He looked tired, very tired, and his weariness had nothing whatever to do with the fact that it was only seven o'clock in the morning. A lunch box was at his feet where he had apparently put it when he began rolling up the garage door. The car in the garage was a 1953-Ford.

"We're police officers," Carella said. "Mind if we ask you a few questions?"

"I'd like to see your badge," Courtenoy said. Carella showed it to him. Courtenoy nodded as if he had performed a precautionary public duty. "What are your questions?" he said. "I'm on my way to work. Is this about that damn building permit again?"

"What building permit?"

"For extending the garage. I'm buying my son a little jalopy, don't want to leave it out on the street. Been having a hell of a time getting a building permit. Can you imagine that? All I want to do is add another twelve feet to the garage. You'd think I was trying to build a city park or something. Is that what this is about?"

From inside the house a woman's voice called, "Who is it, Sid?"

"Nothing, nothing," Courte-

noy said impatiently. "Nobody. Never mind, Bett." He looked at Carella. "My wife. You married?"

"Yes, sir, I'm married," Carella said.

"Then you know," Courtenoy said cryptically. "What are your questions?"

"Ever see this before?" Carella asked. He handed a photostated copy of the check to Courtenoy, who looked at it briefly and handed it back.

"Sure."

"Want to explain it, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Explain what?"

"Explain why Claudia Davis sent you a check for a hundred and twenty dollars."

"As recompense," Courtenoy said unhesitatingly.

"Oh, recompense, huh?" Meyer said. "For what, Mr. Courtenoy? For a little cock-and-bull story?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Recompense for *what*, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"For missing three days' work, what the hell did you think?"

"How's that again?"

"No, what did you *think*?" Courtenoy said angrily, waving his finger at Meyer. "What did you think it was for? Some kind of payoff or something? Is that what you thought?"

"Mr. Courtenoy—"

"I lost three days' work because of that damn inquest. I had to stay up at Triangle Lake all day Monday and Tuesday and then again on Wednesday waiting for the jury decision. I'm a bricklayer. I get five bucks an hour and I lost three days' work, eight hours a day, and so Miss Davis was good enough to send me a check for a hundred and twenty bucks. Now just what the hell did you think, would you mind telling me?"

"Did you know Miss Davis before that day at Triangle Lake, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Never saw her before in my life. What is this? Am I on trial here? What is this?"

From inside the house the woman's voice came again, sharply, "Sidney! Is something wrong? Are you all right?"

"Nothing's wrong. Shut up, will you?"

There was an aggrieved silence from within the clapboard structure. Courtenoy muttered something under his breath and then turned to face the detectives again. "You finished?" he said.

"Not quite, Mr. Courtenoy. We'd like you to tell us what you saw that day up at Triangle Lake."

"What the hell for? Go read the minutes of the inquest if

you're so damn interested. I've got to get to work."

"That can wait, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Like hell it can. This job is away over in—"

"Mr. Courtenoy, we don't want to have to go all the way downtown and come back with a warrant for your arrest."

"My *arrest!* For what? Listen, what did I—?"

"Sidney? Sidney, shall I call the police?" the woman shouted from inside the house.

"Oh, shut the hell up!" Courtenoy answered. "Call the police," he mumbled. "I'm up to my ears in cops and she wants to call the police. What do you want from me? I'm an honest bricklayer. I saw a girl drown. I told it just the way I saw it. Is that a crime? Why are you bothering me?"

"Just tell it again, Mr. Courtenoy. Just the way you saw it."

"She was out in the boat," Courtenoy said, sighing. "I was fishing. Her cousin was on the shore. She fell over the side."

"Josie Thompson."

"Yes, Josie Thompson, whatever the hell her name was."

"She was alone in the boat?"

"Yes.. She was alone in the boat."

"Go on."

"The other one—Miss Davis—

screamed and ran into the water, and began swimming towards her." He shook his head. "She didn't make it in time. That boat was a long way out. When she got there, the lake was still. She dove under and came up, and then dove under again, but it was too late, it was just too late. Then, as she was swimming back, I thought she was going to drown, too. She faltered and sank below the surface, and I waited and I thought sure she was gone. Then there was a patch of yellow that broke through the water, and I saw she was all right."

"Why didn't you jump in to help her, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"I don't know how to swim."

"All right. What happened next?"

"She came out of the water—Miss Davis. She was exhausted and hysterical. I tried to calm her down, but she kept yelling and crying, not making any sense at all. I dragged her over to the car, and I asked her for the car keys. She didn't seem to know what I was talking about at first. 'The keys!' I said, and she just stared at me. 'Your car keys!' I yelled. 'The keys to the car.' Finally she reached in her purse and handed me the keys."

"Go on."

"I drove her into town. It was me who told the story to the police. She couldn't talk, all she could do was babble and scream and cry. It was a terrible thing to watch. I'd never before seen a woman so completely off her nut. We couldn't get two straight words out of her until the next day. Then she was all right. Told the police who she was, explained what I'd already told them the day before, and told them the dead girl was her cousin, Josie Thompson. They dragged the lake and got her out of the water. A shame. A real shame. Nice young girl like that."

"What was the dead girl wearing?"

"Cotton dress. Loafers, I think. Or sandals. Little thin sweater over the dress. A cardigan."

"Any jewelry?"

"I don't think so. No."

"Was she carrying a purse?"

"No. Her purse was in the car with Miss Davis."

"What was Miss Davis wearing?"

"When? The day of the drowning? Or when they pulled her cousin out of the lake?"

"Was she there then?"

"Sure. Identified the body."

"No, I wanted to know what he was wearing on the day of the accident, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Oh, a skirt and blouse, I

think. Ribbon in her hair. Loafers. I'm not sure."

"What color blouse? Yellow?"

"No. Blue."

"You said yellow."

"No, blue. I didn't say yellow."

Carella frowned. "I thought you said yellow earlier." He shrugged. "All right, what happened after the inquest?"

"Nothing much. Miss Davis thanked me for being so kind and said she would send me a check for the time I'd missed. I refused at first and then I thought, What the hell, I'm a hard-working man, and money doesn't grow on trees. So I gave her my address. I figured she could afford it. Driving a Caddy, and hiring a fellow to take it back to the city."

"Why didn't she drive it back herself?"

"I guess she was still shaken up. Listen, that was a terrible experience. Did you ever see anyone die up close?"

"Yes," Carella said.

From inside the house Courtenoy's wife yelled, "Sidney, tell those men to get out of our driveway!"

"You heard her," Courtenoy said, and finished rolling up his garage door.

Nobody likes Monday morning.

It was invented for hangovers. It is really not the beginning of a new week, but only the tail end of the week before. Nobody likes it, and it doesn't have to be rainy or gloomy or blue in order to provoke disaffection. It can be bright and sunny and the beginning of August. It can start with a driveway interview at seven A.M. and grow progressively worse by nine-thirty that same morning.

Monday is Monday and legislature will never change its personality. Monday is Monday, and it stinks.

By nine-thirty that Monday morning Detective Steve Carella was on the edge of total bewilderment and, like any normal person, he blamed it on Monday. He had come back to the squadroom and painstakingly gone over the pile of checks that Claudia Davis had written during the month of July, a total of twenty-five, searching them for some clue to her strangulation, studying them with the scrutiny of a typographer in a print shop.

Several things seemed evident from the checks, but nothing seemed pertinent. He could recall having said, "I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary," and he was beginning to believe he had uttered some

famous last words in those two succinct sentences. For if this was the diary of Claudia Davis, it was a singularly unprovocative account that would never make the nation's best-seller lists.

Most of the checks had been made out to clothing or department stores. Claudia, true to the species, seemed to have a penchant for shopping and a checkbook that yielded to her spending urge. Calls to the various stores represented revealed that her taste ranged through a wide variety of items. A check of sales slips showed that she had purchased during the month of July alone three baby-doll nightgowns, two half slips, a trenchcoat, a wrist watch, four pairs of tapered slacks in various colors, two pairs of walking shoes, a pair of sunglasses, four bikini swimsuits, eight wash-and-wear frocks, two skirts, two cashmere sweaters, half a dozen best-selling novels, a large bottle of aspirin, two bottles of Dramamine, six pieces of luggage, and four boxes of cleansing tissue. The most expensive thing she had purchased was an evening gown costing \$500.

These purchases accounted for most of the checks she had drawn in July. There were also checks to a hairdresser, a florist,

a shoemaker, a candy shop, and three unexplained checks that were drawn to individuals, two men and a woman.

The first was made out to George Badueck.

The second was made out to David Oblinsky.

The third was made out to Martha Fedelson.

Someone on the squad had attacked the telephone directory and come up with addresses for two of the three. The third, Oblinsky, had an unlisted number, but a half hour's argument with a supervisor had finally netted an address for him. The completed list was now on Carella's desk together with all the canceled checks. He should have begun tracking down those names, he knew, but something was bugging him.

"Why did Courtenoy lie to me and Meyer?" he asked Cotton Hawes. "Why did he lie about something as simple as what Claudia Davis was wearing on the day of the drowning?"

"How did he lie?"

"First he said she was wearing yellow, said he saw a patch of yellow break the surface of the lake. Then he changed it to blue. Why did he do that, Cotton?"

"I don't know."

"And if he lied about that, why couldn't he have been

lying about everything? Why couldn't he and Claudia have done in little Josie together."

"I don't know," Hawes said.

"Where'd that twenty thousand bucks come from, Cotton?"

"Maybe it was a stock dividend."

"Maybe. Then why didn't she simply deposit the check? This was cash, Cotton, *cash*. Now where did it come from? That's a nice piece of change. You don't pick twenty grand out of the gutter."

"You sure don't."

"I know where you can get twenty grand, Cotton."

"Where?"

"From an insurance company. When someone dies." Carella nodded once, sharply. "I'm going to make some calls. Dammit, that money had to come from *some place*."

He hit pay dirt on his sixth call. The man he spoke to was named Jeremiah Dodd and was a representative of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc. He recognized Josie Thompson's name at once.

"Oh, yes," he said. "We settled that claim in July."

"Who made the claim, Mr. Dodd?"

"The beneficiary, of course. Just a moment. Let me get the folder on this. Will you hold on, please?"

Carella waited impatiently. Over at the insurance company on the other end of the line he could hear muted voices. A girl giggled suddenly, and he wondered who was kissing whom over by the water cooler. At last Dodd came back on the line.

"Here it is," he said. "Josephine Thompson. Beneficiary was her cousin, Miss Claudia Davis. Oh, yes, now it's all coming back. Yes, this is the one."

"What one?"

"Where the girls were mutual beneficiaries."

"What do you mean?"

"The cousins," Dodd said. "There were two life policies. One for Miss Davis and one for Miss Thompson. And they were mutual beneficiaries."

"You mean Miss Davis was the beneficiary of Miss Thompson's policy and vice versa?"

"Yes, that's right."

"How large were the policies?"

"Oh, very small."

"Well, how *small* then?"

"I believe they were both insured for twelve thousand five hundred. Just a moment; let me check. Yes, that's right."

"And Miss Davis applied for payment on the policy after her cousin died, huh?"

"Yes. Here it is, right here. Josephine Thompson drowned

at Lake Triangle on June fourth. That's right. Claudia Davis sent in the policy and the certificate of death and also a coroner's jury verdict."

"Did you pay her?"

"Yes. It was a perfectly legitimate claim. We began processing it at once."

"Did you send anyone up to Lake Triangle to investigate the circumstances of Miss Thompson's death?"

"Yes, but it was merely a routine investigation. A coroner's inquest is good enough for us, Detective Carella."

"When did you pay Miss Davis?"

"On July first."

"You sent her a check for twelve thousand five hundred dollars, right?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you say . . . ?"

"The policy insured her for twelve-five; that's correct. But there was a double-indemnity clause, you see, and Josephine Thompson's death was accidental. No, we had to pay the policy's limit, Detective Carella. On July first we sent Claudia Davis a check for twenty-five thousand dollars."

There are no mysteries in police work.

Nothing fits into a carefully preconceived scheme. The high point of any given case is very

often the corpse that opens the case. There is no climactic progression; suspense is for the movies. There are only people and curiously twisted motives, and small unexplained details, and coincidence, and the unexpected, and they combine to form a sequence of events, but there is no real mystery, there never is.

There is only life, and sometimes death, and neither follows a rule book. Policemen hate mystery stories because they recognize in them a control that is lacking in their own very real, sometimes routine, sometimes spectacular, sometimes tedious investigation of a case. It is very nice and very clever and very convenient to have all the pieces fit together neatly. It is very kind to think of detectives as master mathematicians working on an algebraic problem whose constants are death and a victim, whose unknown is a murderer. But many of these mastermind detectives have trouble adding up the deductions on their twice-monthly pay checks. The world is full of wizards, for sure, but hardly any of them work for the city police.

There was one big mathematical discrepancy in the Claudia Davis case.

There seemed to be \$5,000 unaccounted for.

Twenty-five grand had been mailed to Claudia Davis on July 1, and she presumably received the check after the Fourth of July holiday, cashed it some place, and then took her money to the Seaboard Bank of America, opened a new checking account, and rented a safety-deposit box. But her total deposit at Seaboard had been \$20,000 whereas the check had been for \$25,000, so where was the laggard five? And who had cashed the check for her?

Mr. Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., explained the company's rather complicated accounting system to Carella. A check was kept in the local office for several days after it was cashed in order to close out the policy, after which it was sent to the main office, in Chicago where it sometimes stayed for several weeks until the master files were closed out. It was then sent to the company's accounting and auditing firm in San Francisco. It was Dodd's guess that the canceled check had already been sent to the California accountants, and he promised to put a tracer on it at once. Carella asked him to please hurry. Someone had cashed that check for Claudia and, supposedly, someone also

had one-fifth of the check's face value.

The very fact that Claudia had not taken the check itself to Seaboard seemed to indicate that she had something to hide. Presumably, she did not want anyone asking questions about insurance company checks, or insurance policies, or double indemnities, or accidental drownings, or especially her cousin Josie. The check was a perfectly good one, and yet she had chosen to cash it *before* opening a new account. Why?

And why, for that matter, had she bothered opening a new account when she had a rather well-stuffed and active account at another bank?

There are only whys in police work, but they do not add up to mystery. They add up to work, and nobody in the world likes work. The bulls of the 87th would have preferred to sit on their backsides and sip gin-and-tonics, but the whys were there, so they put on their hats and their holsters and tried to find some because.

Cotton Hawes systematically interrogated each and every tenant in the rooming house where Claudia Davis had been killed. They all had alibis tighter than the closed fist of an Arabian stablekeeper. In his report to the lieutenant, Hawes expressed the belief that none

of the tenants was guilty of homicide. As far as he was concerned, they were all clean.

Meyer Meyer attacked the 87th's stool pigeons. There were money-changers galore in the precinct and the city, men who turned hot loot into cold cash—for a price. If someone had cashed a \$25,000 check for Claudia and kept \$5,000 of it during the process, couldn't that person conceivably be one of the money-changers? Meyer put the precinct stoolies on the ear, asked them to sound around for word of a Security Insurance Corporation check. The stoolies came up with nothing.

Detective Lieutenant Sam Grossman took his laboratory boys to the murder room and went over it again. And again. And again. He reported that the lock on the door was a snap lock, the kind that clicks shut automatically when the door is slammed. Whoever killed Claudia Davis could have done so without performing any locked-room gymnastics. All he had to do was close the door behind him when he left.

Grossman also reported that Claudia's bed had apparently not been slept in the night of the murder. A pair of shoes had been found at the foot of a large easy chair in the bedroom and a novel was wedged open

on the arm of the chair. He suggested that Claudia had fallen asleep while reading, had awakened, and gone into the other room where she had met her murderer and her death. He had no suggestions as to just who that murderer might have been.

Steve Carella was hot and impatient and overloaded. There were other things happening in the precinct, things like burglaries and muggings and knifings and assaults and kids with summertime on their hands hitting other kids with baseball bats because they didn't like the way they pronounced the word "señor." There were telephones jangling, and reports to be typed in triplicate, and people filing into the squadroom day and night with complaints against the citizenry of that fair city, and the Claudia Davis case was beginning to be a big fat pain in the keester. Carella wondered what it was like to be a shoemaker. And while he was wondering, he began to chase down the checks made out to George Badueck, David Oblinsky, and Martha Fedelson.

Happily, Bert Kling had nothing whatsoever to do with the Claudia Davis case. He hadn't even discussed it with any of the men on the squad. He was a young detective and a

new detective, and the things that happened in that precinct were enough to drive a guy nuts and keep him busy forty-eight hours every day, so he didn't go around sticking his nose into other people's cases. He had enough troubles of his own. One of those troubles was the line-up.

On Wednesday morning Bert Kling's name appeared on the line-up duty chart.

The line-up was held in the gym downtown at Headquarters on High Street. It was held four days a week, Monday to Thursday, and the purpose of the parade was to acquaint the city's detectives with the people who were committing crime, the premise being that crime is a repetitive profession and that a crook will always be a crook, and it's good to know who your adversaries are should you happen to come face to face with them on the street. Timely recognition of a thief had helped crack many a case and had, on some occasions, even saved a detective's life.

So the line-up was a pretty valuable in-group custom. This didn't mean that detectives enjoyed the trip downtown. They drew line-up perhaps once every two weeks and, often as not, line-up duty fell on their day off, and nobody appreciated rubbing elbows with

criminals on his day off.

The line-up that Wednesday morning followed the classic pattern of all line-ups. The detectives sat in the gymnasium on folding chairs, and the chief of detectives sat behind a high podium at the back of the gym. The green shades were drawn, and the stage illuminated, and the offenders who'd been arrested the day before were marched before the assembled bulls while the chief read off the charges and handled the interrogation. The pattern was a simple one. The arresting officer, uniformed or plain-clothes, would join the chief at the rear of the gym when his arrest came up. The chief would read off the felon's name, and then the section of the city in which he'd been arrested, and then a number.

He would say, for example, "Jones, John, Riverhead, three." The "three" would simply indicate that this was the third arrest in Riverhead that day. Only felonies and special types of misdemeanors were handled at the line-up, so this narrowed the list of performers on any given day. Following the case number, the chief would read off the offense, and then say either "Statement" or "No statement," telling the assembled cops that the thief either had or had not said

anything when they'd put the collar on him.

If there had been a statement, the chief would limit his questions to rather general topics since he didn't want to lead the felon into saying anything that might contradict his usually incriminating initial statement, words that could be used against him in court. If there had been *no* statement, the chief would pull out all the stops. He was generally armed with whatever police records were available on the man who stood under the blinding lights, and it was the smart thief who understood the purpose of the line-up and who knew he was not bound to answer a goddamned thing they asked him. The chief of detectives was something like a deadly earnest Mike Wallace, but the stakes were slightly higher here because this involved something a little more important than a novelist plugging his new book or a senator explaining the stand he had taken on a farm bill. These were truly "interviews in depth," and the booby prize was very often a long stretch up the river in a cozy one-windowed room.

The line-up bored the hell out of Kling. It always did. It was like seeing a stage show for the umpteenth time. Every now and then somebody stopped the

show with a really good routine. But usually it was the same old song-and-dance. It wasn't any different that Wednesday. By the time the eighth offender had been paraded and subjected to the chief's bludgeoning interrogation, Kling was beginning to doze. The detective sitting next to him nudged him gently in the ribs.

"... Reynolds, Ralph," the chief was saying, "Isola, four. Caught burgling an apartment on North Third. No statement. How about it, Ralph?"

"How about what?"

"You do this sort of thing often?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Burglary."

"I'm no burglar," Reynolds said.

"I've got his B-sheet here," the chief said. "Arrested for burglary in 1948, witness withdrew her testimony, claimed she had mistakenly identified him. Arrested again for burglary in 1952, convicted for Burglary One, sentenced to ten at Castleview, paroled in '58 on good behavior. You're back at the old stand, huh, Ralph?"

"No, not me. I've been straight ever since I got out."

"Then what were you doing in that apartment during the middle of the night?"

"I was a little drunk. I must

have walked into the wrong building."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought it was my apartment."

"Where do you live, Ralph?"

"On—uh—well—"

"Come on, Ralph."

"Well, I live on South Fifth."

"And the apartment you were in last night is on North Third. You must have been pretty drunk to wander that far off course."

"Yeah, I guess I was pretty drunk."

"Woman in that apartment said you hit her when she woke up. Is that true, Ralph?"

"No. No, hey, I never hit her."

"She says so, Ralph."

"Well, she's got it all wrong."

"Well, now, a doctor's report says somebody clipped her on the jaw, Ralph, now how about that?"

"Well, maybe."

"Yes or no?"

"Well, maybe when she started screaming she got me nervous. I mean, you know, I thought it was my apartment and all."

"Ralph, you were burgling that apartment. How about telling us the truth?"

"No, I got in there by mistake."

"How'd you get in?"

"The door was open."

"In the middle of the night, huh? The door was open?"

"Yeah."

"You sure you didn't pick the lock or something, huh?"

"No, no. Why would I do that? I thought it was my apartment."

"Ralph, what were you doing with burglar's tools?"

"Who? Who, me? Those weren't burglar's tools."

"Then what were they? You had a glass cutter, and a bunch of jimmies, and some punches, and a drill and bits, and three celluloid strips, and some lockpicking tools, and eight skeleton keys. Those sound like burglar's tools to me, Ralph."

"No. I'm a carpenter."

"Yeah; you're a carpenter, all right, Ralph. We searched your apartment, Ralph, and found a couple of things we're curious about. Do you always keep sixteen wrist watches and four typewriters and twelve bracelets and eight rings and two mink stoles and three sets of silverware, Ralph?"

"Yeah. I'm a collector."

"Of other people's things. We also found four hundred dollars in American currency and five thousand dollars in French francs. Where'd you get that money, Ralph?"

"Which?"

"Whichever you feel like telling us about."

"Well, the U.S. stuff I—I won at the track. And the other, well, a Frenchman owed me some gold, and so he paid me in francs. That's all."

"We're checking our stolen-goods list right this minute, Ralph."

"So check!" Reynolds said, suddenly angry. "What the hell do you want from me? Work for your goddamn living! You want it all on a platter! Like fun! I told you everything I'm gonna . . ."

"Get him out of here," the chief said. "Next, Blake, Donald, Bethtown, two. Attempted rape. No statement . . ."

Bert Kling made himself comfortable on the folding chair and began to doze again.

The check made out to George Badueck was numbered 018. It was a small check, five dollars. It did not seem very important to Carella, but it was one of the unexplained three, and he decided to give it a whirl.

Badueck, as it turned out, was a photographer. His shop was directly across the street from the County Court Building in Isola. A sign in his window advised that he took photographs for chauffeur's

licenses, hunting licenses, passports, taxicab permits, pistol permits, and the like. The shop was small and crowded. Badueck fitted into the shop like a beetle in an ant trap. He was a huge man with thick, unruly hair and the smell of developing fluid on him.

"Who remembers?" he said. "I get millions of people in here every day of the week. They pay me in cash, they pay me with checks, they're ugly, they're pretty, they're skinny, they're fat, they all look the same on the pictures I take. Lousy. They all look like I'm photographing them for you guys. You never see any of these official-type pictures? Man, they look like mug shots, all of them. So who remembers this—what's her name? Claudia Davis, yeah. Another face, that's all. Another mug shot. Why? Is the check bad or something?"

"No, it's a good check."

"So what's the fuss?"

"No fuss," Carella said. "Thanks a lot."

He sighed and went out into the August heat. The County Court Building across the street was white and Gothic in the sunshine. He wiped a handkerchief across his forehead and thought, Another face, that's all.

Sighing, he crossed the street

and entered the building. It was cool in the high-vaulted corridors. He consulted the directory and went up to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles first. He asked the clerk there if anyone named Claudia Davis had applied for a license requiring a photograph.

"We only require pictures on chauffeurs' licenses," the clerk said.

"Well, would you check?" Carella asked.

"Sure. Might take a few minutes, though. Would you have a seat?"

Carella sat. It was very cool. It felt like October. He looked at his watch. It was almost time for lunch, and he was getting hungry. The clerk came back and motioned him over.

"We've got a Claudia Davis listed," he said, "but she's already got a license, and she didn't apply for a new one."

"What kind of license?"

"Operator's."

"When does it expire?"

"Next September."

"And she hasn't applied for anything needing a photo?"

"Nope. Sorry."

"That's all right. Thanks," Carella said.

He went out into the corridor again. He hardly thought it likely that Claudia Davis had applied for a permit to own or operate a taxicab, so

he skipped the Hack Bureau and went upstairs to Pistol Permits. The woman he spoke to there was very kind and very efficient. She checked her files and told him that no one named Claudia Davis had ever applied for either a carry or a premises pistol permit.

Carella thanked her and went into the hall again. He was very hungry. His stomach was beginning to growl. He debated having lunch and then returning and decided, Hell, I'd better get it done now.

The man behind the counter in the Passport Bureau was old and thin and he wore a green eyeshade. Carella asked his question, and the old man went to his files and creakingly returned to the window where Carella waited.

"That's right," he said.

"What's right?"

"She did. Claudia Davis. She applied for a passport."

"When?"

The old man checked the slip of paper in his trembling hands. "July twentieth," he said.

"Did you give it to her?"

"We accepted her application, sure. Isn't us who issues the passports. We've got to send the application on to Washington."

"But you did accept it?"

"Sure, why not? Had all the

necessary stuff. Why shouldn't we accept it?"

"What was the necessary stuff?"

"Two photos, proof of citizenship, filled-out application, and cash."

"What did she show as proof of citizenship?"

"Her birth certificate."

"Where was she born?"

"California."

"She paid you in cash?"

"That's right."

"Not a check?"

"Nope. She started to write a check, but the blamed pen was on the blink. We use ballpoints, you know, and it gave out after she filled in the application. So she paid me in cash. It's not all that much money, you know."

"I see. Thank you," Carella said.

"Not at all," the old man replied, and he creaked back to his files to replace the record on Claudia Davis.

The check was numbered 007, and it was dated July twelfth, and it was made out to a woman named Martha Fedelson.

Miss Fedelson adjusted her pince-nez and looked at the check. Then she moved some papers aside on the small desk in the cluttered office, and put the check down, and leaned

closer to it, and studied it again.

"Yes," she said, "that check was made out to me. Claudia Davis wrote it right in this office." Miss Fedelson smiled. "If you can call it an office. Desk space and a telephone. But then, I'm just starting, you know."

"How long have you been a travel agent, Miss Fedelson?"

"Six months now. It's very exciting work."

"Had you ever booked a trip for Miss Davis before?"

"No. This was the first time."

"Did someone refer her to you?"

"No. She picked my name out of the phone book."

"And asked you to arrange this trip for her, is that right?"

"Yes."

"And this check? What's it for?"

"Her airline tickets, and deposits at several hotels."

"Hotels where?"

"In Paris and Dijon. And then another in Lausanne, Switzerland."

"She was going to Europe?"

"Yes. From Lausanne she was heading down to the Italian Riviera. I was working on that for her, too. Getting transportation and the hotels, you know."

"When did she plan to leave?"

"September first."

"Well, that explains the luggage and the clothes," Carella said aloud.

"I'm sorry?" Miss Fedelson said, and she smiled and raised her eyebrows.

"Nothing, nothing," Carella said. "What was your impression of Miss Davis?"

"Oh, that's hard to say. She was only here once, you understand." Miss Fedelson thought for a moment, and then said; "I suppose she could have been a pretty girl if she tried, but she wasn't trying. Her hair was short and dark, and she seemed rather—well, withdrawn, I guess. She didn't take her sunglasses off all the while she was here. I suppose you would call her shy. Or frightened. I don't know." She smiled again. "Have I helped any?"

"Well, now we know she was going abroad," Carella said.

"September is a good time to go," Miss Fedelson answered. "In September the tourists have all gone home." There was a wistful sound to her voice.

Carella thanked her for her time and left the small office with its travel folders on the cluttered desk top.

He was running out of checks and running out of ideas. Everything seemed to point toward a girl in flight, a

girl in hiding, but what was there to hide, what was there to hide from? Josie Thompson had been in that boat alone. The coroner's jury had labeled it accidental drowning. The insurance company hadn't contested Claudia's claim, and they'd given her a legitimate check that she could have cashed anywhere in the world. And yet there *was* hiding, and there *was* flight—and Carella couldn't understand why. He shook his head.

He took the list of remaining checks from his pocket. The girl's shoemaker, the girl's hairdresser, a florist, a candy shop. None of them really important. And the remaining check made out to an individual, the check numbered 006 and dated July eleventh, and written to a man named David Oblinsky in the amount of \$45.75.

Carella had his lunch at two-thirty and then went downtown. He found Oblinsky in a diner near the bus terminal. Oblinsky was sitting on one of the counter stools, and he was drinking a cup of coffee. He asked Carella to join him, and Carella did.

"You traced me through that check, huh?" he said. "The phone company gave you my number and my address, huh? I'm unlisted, you know. They

ain't suppose to give out my number."

"Well, they made a special concession because it was police business."

"Yeah, well, suppose the cops called and asked for Marlon Brando's number? You think they'd give it out? Like hell they would. I don't like that. No, sir, I don't like it one damn bit."

"What do you do, Mr. Oblinsky? Is there a reason for the unlisted number?"

"I drive a cab is what I do. Sure there's a reason. It's classy to have an unlisted number. Didn't you know that?"

Carella smiled. "No, I didn't."

"Sure, it is."

"Why did Claudia Davis give you this check?" Carella asked.

"Well, I work for a cab company here in this city, you see. But usually on weekends or on my day off I use my own car and I take people on long trips, you know what I mean? Like to the country, or the mountains, or the beach, wherever they want to go. I don't care: I'll take them wherever they want to go."

"I see."

"Sure. So in June sometime, the beginning of June it was, I get a call from this guy I know up at Triangle Lake, he tells me there's a rich broad there who

needs somebody to drive her Caddy back to the city for her. He said it was worth thirty bucks if I was willing to take the train up and the heap back. I told him, no sir. I wanted forty-five or it was no deal. I knew I had him over a barrel, you understand? He'd already told me he checked with the local hicks and none of them felt like making the ride. So he said he would talk it over with her and get back to me. Well, he called again—you know, it burns me up about the phone company. They ain't supposed to give out my number like that. Suppose it was Doris Day? You think they'd give out her number? I'm gonna raise a stink about this, believe me."

"What happened when he called you back?"

"Well, he said she was willing to pay forty-five, but like could I wait until July sometime when she would send me a check because she was a little short right at the moment. So I figured what the hell, am I going to get stiffed by a dame who's driving a 1960 Caddy? I figured I could trust her until July. But I also told him, if that was the case, then I also wanted her to pay the tolls on the way back, which I don't ordinarily ask my customers to do. That's what the seventy-five cents was for. The tolls."

"So you took the train up there and then drove Miss Davis and the Cadillac back to the city, is that right?"

"Yeah."

"I suppose she was pretty distraught on the trip home."

"Huh?"

"You know. Not too coherent."

"Huh?"

"Broken up. Crying. Hysterical," Carella said.

"No. No, she was okay."

"Well, what I mean is—" Carella hesitated. "I assumed she wasn't capable of driving the car back herself."

"Yeah, that's right. That's why she hired me."

"Well, then—"

"But not because she was broken up or anything."

"Then why?" Carella frowned. "Was there a lot of luggage? Did she need your help with that?"

"Yeah, sure. Both hers and her cousin's. Her cousin drowned, you know."

"Yes, I know that."

"But anybody coulda helped her with the luggage," Oblinsky said. "No, that wasn't why she hired me. She really *needed* me, mister."

"Why?"

"Why? Because she don't know how to drive, that's why."

Carella stared at him.

"You're wrong," he said.

"Oh, no," Oblinsky said. "She can't drive, believe me. While I was putting the luggage in the trunk, I asked her to start the car, and she didn't even know how to do that. Hey, you think I ought to raise a fuss with the phone company?"

"I don't know," Carella said, rising suddenly. All at once the check made out to Claudia Davis' hairdresser seemed terribly important to him. He had almost run out of checks, but all at once he had an idea.

The hairdresser's salon was on South Twenty-third, just off Jefferson Avenue. A green canopy covered the sidewalk outside the salon. The words ARTURO MANFREDI, INC., were lettered discreetly in white on the canopy. A glass plaque in the window repeated the name of the establishment and added, for the benefit of those who did not read either *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*, that there were two branches of the shop, one here in Isola and another in "Nassau, the Bahamas." Beneath that, in smaller words "Internationally Renowned."

Carella and Hawes went into the shop at four-thirty in the afternoon. Two meticulously coifed and manicured women were sitting in the small reception room, their expen-

sively sleek legs crossed, apparently awaiting either their chauffeurs, their husbands, or their lovers. They both looked up expectantly when the detectives entered, expressed mild disappointment by only slightly raising newly plucked eyebrows, and went back to reading their fashion magazines.

Carella and Hawes walked to the desk. The girl behind the desk was a blonde with a brilliant shellacked look and a finishing-school voice.

"Yes?" she said. "May I help you?"

She lost a tiny trace of her poise when Carella flashed his buzzer. She read the raised lettering on the shield, glanced at the photo on the plastic-encased I.D. card, quickly regained her polished calm, and said coolly and unemotionally, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

"We wonder if you can tell us anything about the girl who wrote this check?" Carella said. He reached into his jacket pocket, took out a photostat of the check, and put it on the desk before the blonde. The blonde looked at it casually.

"What is the name?" she asked. "I can't make it out."

"Claudia Davis."

"D-A-V-I-S?"

"Yes."

"I don't recognize the name," the blonde said. "She's

not one of our regular customers."

"But she did make out a check to your salon," Carella said. "She wrote this on July seventh. Would you please check your records and find out why she was here and who took care of her?"

"I'm sorry," the blonde said.  
"What?"

"I'm sorry, but we close at five o'clock, and this is the busiest time of the day for us. I'm sure you can understand that. If you'd care to come back a little later—"

"No, we wouldn't care to come back a little later," Carella said. "Because if we came back a little later, it would be with a search warrant and possibly a warrant for the seizure of your books, and sometimes that can cause a little commotion among the gossip columnists, and that kind of commotion might add to your international renown a little bit. We've had a long day, miss, and this is important, so how about it?"

"Of course. We're always delighted to cooperate with the police," the blonde said frigidly. "Especially when they're so well mannered."

"Yes, we're all of that," Carella answered.

"July seventh, did you say?"  
"July seventh."

The blonde left the desk and went into the back of the salon. A brunette came out front and said, "Has Miss Marie left for the evening?"

"Who's Miss Marie?" Hawes asked.

"The blonde girl."

"No. She's getting something for us."

"That white streak is very attractive," the brunette said. "I'm Miss Olga."

"How do you do."

"Fine, thank you," Miss Olga said. "When she comes back, would you tell her there's something wrong with one of the dryers on the third floor?"

"Yes, I will," Hawes said.

Miss Olga smiled, waved, and vanished into the rear of the salon again. Miss Marie reappeared a few moments later. She looked at Carella and said, "A Miss Claudia Davis was here on July seventh. Mr. Sam worked on her. Would you like to talk to him?"

"Yes, we would."

"Then follow me, please," she said curtly.

They followed her into the back of the salon past women who sat with crossed legs, wearing smocks, their heads in hair dryers.

"Oh, by the way," Hawes said, "Miss Olga said to tell you there's something wrong with one of the third-floor dryers."

"Thank you," Miss Marie said.

Hawes felt particularly clumsy in this world of women's machines. There was an air of delicate efficiency about the place, and Hawes—six feet two inches tall in his bare soles, weighing a hundred and ninety pounds—was certain he would knock over a bottle of nail polish or a pail of hair rinse. As they entered the second-floor salon, as he looked down that long line of humming space helmets at women with crossed legs and what looked like barbers' aprons covering their nylon slips, he became aware of a new phenomenon. The women were slowly turning their heads inside the dryers to look at the white streak over his left temple.

He suddenly felt like a horse's rear end. For whereas the streak was the legitimate result of a knifing—they had shaved his red hair to get at the wound, and it had grown back this way—he realized all at once that many of these women had shelled out somebody's hard-earned dollars to simulate identical white streaks in their own hair, and he no longer felt like a cop making a business call. Instead, he felt like a customer who had come to have his goddamned streak touched up a little.

"This is Mr. Sam," Miss Marie said, and Hawes turned to see Carella shaking hands with a rather elongated man. The man wasn't particularly tall, he was simply elongated. He gave the impression of being seen from the side: seats in a movie theater, stretched out of true proportion, curiously two-dimensional. He wore a white smock, and there were three narrow combs in the breast pocket. He carried a pair of scissors in one thin, sensitive-looking hand.

"How do you do?" he said to Carella, and he executed a half bow, European in origin, American in execution. He turned to Hawes, took his hand, shook it, and again said, "How do you do?"

"They're from the police," Miss Marie said briskly, releasing Mr. Sam from any obligation to be polite, and then left the men alone.

"A woman named Claudia Davis was here on July seventh," Carella said. "Apparently she had her hair done by you. Would you be kind enough to tell us what you remember about her?"

"Miss Davis, Miss Davis," Mr. Sam said, touching his high forehead in an attempt at visual shorthand, trying to convey the concept of thought without having to do the accompanying

brainwork. "Let me see, Miss Davis, Miss Davis."

"Yes."

"Yes, Miss Davis. A very pretty blonde."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "A brunette. You're thinking of the wrong person."

"No, I'm thinking of the right person," Mr. Sam said. He tapped his temple with one extended forefinger, another piece of visual abbreviation. "I remember. Claudia Davis. A blonde."

"A blonde," Carella insisted, and he kept watching Mr. Sam.

"When she left. But when she came, a blonde."

"What?" Hawes said.

"She was a blonde, a very pretty, natural blonde. It is rare. Natural blondness, I mean. I couldn't understand why she wanted to change the color."

"You dyed her hair?" Hawes asked.

"That is correct."

"Did she say *why* she wanted to be a brunette?"

"No, sir. I argued with her. I said, 'You have *beautiful* hair, I can do *marvelous* things with this hair of yours. You are a blonde, my dear, there are drab women who come in here every day of the week and *beg* to be turned into blondes.' No. She would not listen. I dyed it for her. Made her a blonde."

Mr. Sam seemed to become offended by the idea all over again. He looked at the detectives as if they had been responsible for the stubbornness of Claudia Davis.

"What else did you do for her, Mr. Sam?" Carella asked.

"The dye, a cut, and a set. And I believe one of the girls gave her a facial and a manicure."

"What do you mean by a cut? Was her hair long when she came here?"

"Yes, beautiful long blonde hair. She wanted it cut. I cut it." Mr. Sam shook his head. "A pity. She looked terrible. I don't usually say this about someone I worked on, but she walked out of here looking terrible. You would hardly recognize her as the same pretty blonde who came in not three hours before."

"Thank you, Mr. Sam. We know you're busy."

In the street outside Hawes said, "You knew before we went in there, didn't you, Mr. Steve?"

"I suspected, Mr. Cotton. Come on, let's get back to the squad."

They kicked it around like a bunch of advertising executives. They sat in Lieutenant Byrnes' office and tried to find out how the cookie crumbled and which way the Tootsie rolled. They

were just throwing out a life preserver to see if anyone grabbed at it, that's all. What they were doing, you see, was running up the flag to see if anyone saluted, that's all.

The lieutenant's office was a four-window office because he was top man in this particular combine. It was a very elegant office. It had an electric fan all its own, and a big wide desk. It got cross ventilation from the street. It was really very pleasant. Well, to tell the truth, it was a pretty ratty office in which to be holding a top-level meeting, but it was the best the precinct had to offer. And after a while you got used to the chipping paint and the soiled walls and the bad lighting and the stench of urine from the men's room down the hall. Peter Byrnes didn't work for B.B.D. & O. He worked for the city. Somehow, there was a difference.

"I just put in a call to Irene Miller," Carella said. "I asked her to describe Claudia Davis to me, and she went through it all over again. Short dark hair, shy, plain. Then I asked her to describe the cousin, Josie Thompson." Carella nodded glumly. "Guess what?"

"A pretty girl," Hawes said. "A pretty girl with long blonde hair."

"Sure. Why, Mrs. Miller

practically spelled it out the first time we talked to her. It's all there in the report. She said they were like black and white in looks and personality. Black and white, sure. A brunette and a goddamn blonde!"

"That explains the yellow," Hawes said.

"What yellow?"

"Courtenoy. He said he saw a patch of yellow breaking the surface. He wasn't talking about her clothes, Steve. He was talking about her hair."

"It explains a lot of things," Carella said. "It explains why shy Claudia Davis was preparing for her European trip by purchasing baby-doll night-gowns and bikini bathing suits. And it explains why the undertaker up there referred to Claudia as a pretty girl. And it explains why our necropsy report said she was thirty when everybody talked about her as if she were much younger."

"The girl who drowned wasn't Josie, huh?" Meyer said. "You figure she was Claudia."

"Damn right I figure she was Claudia."

"And you figure Josie cut her hair afterward, and dyed it and took her cousin's name and tried to pass as her cousin until she could get out of the country, huh?" Meyer said.

"Why?" Byrnes said. He was a compact man with a compact

bullet head and a chunky economical body. He did not like to waste time or words.

"Because the trust income was in Claudia's name. Because Josie didn't have a dime of her own."

"She could have collected on her cousin's insurance policy," Meyer said.

"Sure, but that would have been the end of it. The trust called for those stocks to be turned over to U.C.L.A. if Claudia died. A college, for Pete's sake! How do you suppose Josie felt about that? Look, I'm not trying to hang a homicide on her. I just think she took advantage of a damn good situation. Claudia was in that boat alone. When she fell over the side, Josie really tried to rescue her, no question about it. But she missed, and Claudia drowned. Okay. Josie went all to pieces, couldn't talk straight, crying, sobbing, real hysterical woman; we've seen them before. But came the dawn. And with the dawn Josie began thinking. They were away from the city, strangers in a strange town."

"Claudia had drowned but no one knew that she was Claudia. No one but Josie. She had no identification on her, remember? Her purse was in the car. Okay. If Josie identified her cousin correctly, she'd

collect twenty-five grand on the insurance policy, and then all that stock would be turned over to the college, and that would be the end of the gravy train. But suppose, just suppose Josie told the police the girl in the lake was Josie Thompson? Suppose she said, 'I, Claudia Davis, tell you that girl who drowned is my cousin, Josie Thompson'?"

Hawes nodded. "Then she'd still collect on an insurance policy, and also fall heir to those fat security dividends coming in."

"Right. What does it take to cash a dividend check? A bank account, that's all. A bank account with an established signature. So all she had to do was open one, sign her name as Claudia Davis, and then endorse every dividend check that came in exactly the same way."

"Which explains the new account," Meyer said. "She couldn't use Claudia's old account because the bank undoubtedly knew both Claudia and her signature. So Josie had to forfeit the sixty grand at Highland Trust and start from scratch."

"And while she was building a new identity and a new fortune," Hawes said, "just to make sure Claudia's few friends forgot all about her, Josie was running off to Europe. She may

have planned to stay there for years."

"It all ties in," Carella said. "Claudia had a driver's license. She was the one who drove the car away from Stewart City. But Josie had to hire a chauffeur to take her back."

"And would Claudia, who was so meticulous about money matters, have kept so many people waiting for payment?" Hawes said. "No, sir. That was Josie. And Josie was broke. Josie was waiting for that insurance policy to pay off so she could settle those debts and get the hell out of the country."

"Well, I admit it adds up," Meyer said.

Peter Byrnes never wasted words. "Who cashed that twenty-five-thousand-dollar check for Josie?" he said.

There was silence in the room.

"Who's got the missing five grand?" he said.

There was another silence.

"Who killed Josie?" he said.

Jeremiah Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., did not call until two days later. He asked to speak to Detective Carella, and when he got him on the phone, he said, "Mr. Carella, I've just heard from San Francisco on that check."

"What check?" Carella asked. He had been interrogating a witness to a knifing in a grocery store on Culver Avenue. The Claudia Davis or rather the Josie Thompson Case was not quite yet in the Open File, but it was ready to be dumped there, and was the farthest thing from Carella's mind at the moment.

"The check paid to Claudia Davis," Dodd said.

"Oh, yes. Who cashed it?"

"Well, there are two endorsements on the back. One was made by Claudia Davis, of course. The other was made by an outfit called Leslie Summers, Inc. It's a regular company stamp marked 'For Deposit Only' and signed by one of the officers."

"Have any idea what sort of a company that is?" Carella asked.

"Yes," Dodd said. "They handle foreign exchange."

"Thank you," Carella said, and hung up the phone.

He went there with Bert Kling later that afternoon. He went with Kling completely by chance and only because Kling was heading downtown to buy his mother a birthday gift and offered Carella a ride. When they parked the car, Kling asked, "How long will this take, Steve?"

"Few minutes, I guess."

"Want to meet me back here?"

"Well, I'll be at 720 Hall, Leslie Summers, Inc. If you're through before me, come on over."

"Okay, I'll see you," Kling said.

They parted on Hall Avenue without shaking hands. Carella found the street-level office of Leslie Summers, Inc., and walked in. A counter ran the length of the room, and there were several girls behind it. One of the girls was speaking to a customer in French and another was talking Italian to a man who wanted lire in exchange for dollars. A board behind the desk quoted the current exchange rate for countries all over the world.

Carella got in line and waited. When he reached the counter, the girl who'd been speaking French said, "Yes, sir?"

"I'm a detective," Carella said. He opened his wallet to where his shield was pinned to the leather. "You cashed a check for Miss Claudia Davis sometime in July. An insurance-company check for twenty-five thousand dollars. Would you happen to remember it?"

"No, sir, I don't think I handled it."

"Would you check around and see who did, please?"

The girl held a brief consultation with the other girls, and then walked to a desk behind which sat a corpulent, balding man with a razor-thin mustache. They talked with each other for a full five minutes. The man kept waving his hands. The girl kept trying to explain about the insurance-company check. The bell over the front door sounded. Bert Kling came in, looked around, saw Carella, and joined him at the counter.

"All done?" Carella asked.

"Yeah, I bought her a charm for her bracelet. How about you?"

"They're holding a summit meeting," Carella said.

The fat man waddled over to the counter. "What is the trouble?" he asked Carella.

"No trouble. Did you cash a check for twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes. Is the check no good?"

"It's a good check."

"It looked like a good check. It was an insurance-company check. The young lady waited while we called the company. They said it was bona fide and we should accept it. Was it a bad check?"

"No, no, it was fine."

"She had identification. It all seemed very proper."

"What did she show you?"

"A driver's license or a passport is what we usually require. But she had neither. We accepted her birth certificate. After all, we *did* call the company. Is the check no good?"

"It's fine. But the check was for twenty-five thousand, and we're trying to find out what happened to five thousand of—"

"Oh, yes. The francs."

"What?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of French francs," the fat man said. "She was going abroad?"

"Yes, she was going abroad," Carella said. He sighed heavily. "Well, that's that, I guess."

"It all seemed very proper," the fat man insisted.

"Oh, it was. Thank you. Come on, Bert."

They walked down Hall Avenue in silence.

"Beats me," Carella said.

"What's that, Steve?"

"This case." He sighed again. "Oh, what the hell!"

"Yeah, let's get some coffee. What was all this business about all those francs?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of francs," Carella said.

"The French are getting a big play lately, huh?" Kling said, smiling. "Here's a place. This look okay?"

"Yeah, fine." Carella pulled open the door of the luncheonette. "What do you mean, Bert?"

"With the francs."

"What about them?"

"The exchange rate must be very good."

"I don't get you."

"You know. All those francs kicking around."

"Bert, what the hell are you talking about?"

"Weren't you with me? Last Wednesday?"

"With you where?"

"The line-up. I thought you were with me."

"No, I wasn't," Carella said tiredly.

"Oh, well, that's why."

"That's why what? Bert, for the love of—"

"That's why you don't remember him."

"Who?"

"The punk they brought in on that burglary pickup. They found five grand in French francs in his apartment."

Carella felt as if he'd just been hit by a truck.

It had been crazy from the beginning. Some of them are like that. The girl had looked black, but she was really white. They thought she was Claudia Davis, but she was Josie Thompson. And they had been looking for a murderer when all

there happened to be was a burglar.

They brought him up from his cell where he was awaiting trial for Burglary One. He came up in an elevator with a police escort. The police van had dropped him off at the side door of the Criminal Courts Building, and he had entered the corridor under guard and been marched down through the connecting tunnel and into the building that housed the district attorney's office, and then taken into the elevator. The door of the elevator opened into a tiny room upstairs. The other door of the room was locked from the outside and a sign on it read NO ADMITTANCE.

The patrolman who'd brought Ralph Reynolds up to the interrogation room stood with his back against the elevator door all the while the detectives talked to him, and his right hand was on the butt of his Police Special.

"I never heard of her," Reynolds said.

"Claudia Davis," Carella said. "Or Josie Thompson. Take your choice of names. Either one will do."

"I don't know either one of them. What the hell is this? You got me on a burglary rap, now you try to pull in everything was ever done in this city?"

"Who said anything was done, Reynolds?"

"If nothing was done, why'd you drag me up here?"

"They found five thousand bucks in French francs in your pad, Reynolds. Where'd you get it?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Don't get snotty, Reynolds! Where'd you get that money?"

"A guy owed it to me. He paid me in francs. He was a French guy—so he'd pay in francs."

"What's his name?"

"I can't remember."

"You'd better start trying."

"Pierre something."

"Pierre what?" Meyer said.

"Pierre La Salle, something like that. I didn't know him too good."

"But you lent him five grand, huh?"

"Yeah."

"What were you doing on the night of August first?"

"Why? What happened on August first?"

"You tell us."

"I don't know what I was doing."

"Were you working?"

"I'm unemployed."

"You know what we mean!"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Were you breaking into apartments?"

"No."

"Speak up! Yes or no?"

"I said no."

"He's lying, Steve," Meyer said.

"Sure he is."

"Yeah, sure I am. Look, cop, you got nothing on me but Burglary One, if that. And that you got to prove in court. So stop trying to hang anything else on me. You ain't got a chance."

"Not unless those prints check out," Carella said quickly.

"What prints?"

"The prints we found on the dead girl's throat," Carella lied.

"I was wearing—!"

The small room was as still as death.

Reynolds sighed heavily. He looked at the floor.

"You want to tell us?"

"No," he said. "Go to hell."

He finally told them. After twelve hours of repeated questioning he finally broke down. He hadn't meant to kill her, he said. He didn't even know anybody was in the apartment. He had looked in the bedroom, and the bed was empty. He hadn't seen her asleep in one of the chairs, fully dressed.

He had found the French money in a big jar on one of the shelves over the sink. He had taken the money and then accidentally dropped the jar,

and she woke up and came into the room and saw him and began screaming. So he grabbed her by the throat. He only meant to shut her up. But she kept struggling. She was very strong. He kept holding on to her, but only to shut her up.

But she kept struggling, so he had to hold on. She kept struggling as if—as if he'd really been trying to kill her, as if she didn't want to lose her life. But that was manslaughter, wasn't it? He wasn't trying to kill her. That wasn't homicide, was it?

"I didn't mean to kill her!" he shouted as they took him into the elevator. "She began screaming! I'm not a killer! Look at me! Do I look like a killer?" And then, as the elevator began dropping to the basement, he shouted, "I'm a burglar!" as if proud of his profession, as if stating that he was something more than a common thief, as if he was a trained workman, a skilled artisan.

"I'm not a killer! I'm a burglar!" he screamed. "I'm not a killer! I'm not a killer!" And his voice echoed down the elevator shaft as the car dropped to the basement and the waiting van.

They sat in the small room for several moments after he was gone.

"Hot in here," Meyer said.

"Yeah." Carella nodded.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Maybe he's right," Meyer said. "Maybe he's only a burglar."

"He stopped being that the minute he stole a life, Meyer."

"Josie Thompson stole a life, too."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "She only borrowed one. There's a difference, Meyer."

The room went silent.

"You feel like some coffee?" Meyer asked.

"Sure."

They took the elevator down and then walked out into the brilliant August sunshine. The streets were teeming with life. They walked into the human swarm, but they were silent.

At last Carella said, "I guess I think she shouldn't be dead. I guess I think that someone who tried so hard to make a life shouldn't have had it taken away from her."

Meyer put his hand on Carella's shoulder. "Listen," he said earnestly. "It's a job. It's only a job."

"Sure," Carella said. "It's only a job."

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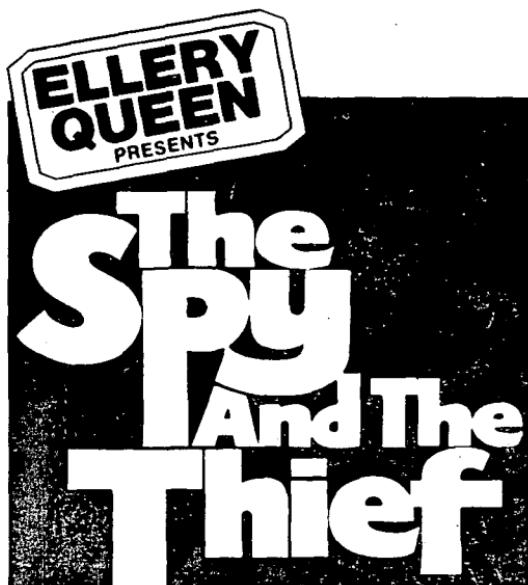
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